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Fraternalities and sororities are facing ever-increasing scrutiny from the public and campus leaders as reports of serious policy violations dominate current headlines (Clay, 2018; Reilly, 2018; Spencer, 2018). However, there are many redeeming qualities of the Greek system that often get overlooked in the news. This dissertation investigates some of the potential positive outcomes of Greek life by examining how Greek-affiliated students' involvement changes after they have become a member of a chapter. Through a qualitative approach, this study shows that students who become involved in Greek Life become more deeply involved on their campus and forge stronger bonds with the campus community.

This dissertation explores how students initially make connections, and become involved in campus activities, and how this involvement changes over time as they become more deeply involved in their chapters. Through the relationships these students build with their chapter members, they experience new connections to other students, events, and activities in which they otherwise would not have participated. Research (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1986; Kuh, 1991) has shown that students who build these deep connections to their campus are more likely to be successful and persist to graduation.

THE IMPACT OF GREEK AFFILIATION ON  
STUDENT INVOLVEMENT PATTERNS

by

Christopher O'Connor

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Approved by

Colleen Fairbanks  
Committee Chair

## APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by CHRISTOPHER O’CONNOR has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Colleen M. Fairbanks

Committee Members \_\_\_\_\_

Laura Gonzalez

\_\_\_\_\_

Brad Johnson

\_\_\_\_\_

Jennifer Latino

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Final Oral Examination

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In higher education, Greek Life and student involvement are two closely related fields of research that remain surprisingly siloed in both practice and the literature. Both functional areas have the same overall goal and purpose of developing students into leaders and well-rounded individuals, yet there seems to be very little overlap in research of understanding how these two fields interact. In fact, when searching research databases, very few hits come up with “Greek” and “Student Involvement.” Once students join a Greek chapter, their involvement in other aspects of the campus does not necessarily end, and it is important for student affairs practitioners to understand how involvement patterns may change after a student affiliates themselves with a chapter in the Greek Life system.

The value of Greek Life has been a hot topic in the news in recent years as headlines detailing various failures of the system dominate the news cycle (Clay, 2018; Reilly, 2018; Spencer, 2018). While to be sure, there are many challenges facing today’s Greek advisors, such as issues of hazing, sexual assault, alcohol, racism, and more that continue to persist as problems in the Greek world. However, there are many positive aspects to the institution that make it worth the time and effort that colleges and universities devote to managing Greek Life that will be explored in this dissertation. While some attention is given to understanding the negative factors of Greek Life



(Nuwer, 1999), there is far less being reported on some of the potential positive outcomes. One area that has not been studied in detail is the ways in which Greek-affiliated students get involved on their campus and the impact of their Greek affiliation on their campus engagement. This relationship is important because student involvement has been linked to a variety of positive outcomes related to student development and retention (Astin, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Tinto, 1993). However, there is still a wide gap in what is known about Greek-affiliated students and student engagement.

Student involvement has become an important issue since the publication of the work of Alexander Astin in the 1980s in which he theorized that students who become more involved on their campus are more likely to reap many developmental benefits (Astin, 1984). In light of this theory, it is important to understand the nature of the relationship between student involvement and Greek affiliation. Some work has begun to investigate this relationship; authors such as Hayek, Carini, O'Day, & Kuh (2002), Patton, Bridges, & Flowers (2011), and Bureau, Ryan, Ahren, Shoup, & Torres (2011) have conducted quantitative projects that examine this phenomenon. However, they are limited in that they are all quantitative in nature, and most draw exclusively on data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). These studies answer some of the broad questions about student involvement and Greek affiliation, but more work is needed that examines the how and why questions.

On many American campuses, Greek Life is an important part of the college experience and has been around almost as long as universities themselves (Torbensohn & Parks, 2009). The first true Greek chapter was founded in 1776 at William and Mary

University by five students who adopted the Greek initials Phi Beta Kappa (Torbenenson & Parks, 2009). Education in early America was characterized by a “lack of freedom and variety” and led to the formation of literary and debate societies as an outlet for these students (Whipple & Sullivan, 1998, p. 8). Out of these early student organizations, the beginning of the modern Greek system arose (Rudolph, 1990). These early Greek letter societies were a way for students to fill a social and developmental need that the colleges themselves would not provide until many years later. This early form of student involvement would be the first in a tradition of students seeking to gain opportunities from common affiliation (Rudolph, 1990). From here, Greek Life has grown into an expansive and diverse system that now includes students from all walks of life on campuses across the country. For example, the websites of the two of the largest councils, the National Panhellenic Conference and the North-American Intrafraternity Conference, boast as many as 66 chapters and 380,000 members respectively (About Our Chapters, 2018).

Student involvement enjoyed a time in the spotlight as one of the most prominent emerging fields of research in the 1980s. Astin’s (1984) Student Involvement Theory is one of the most well-known student development theories, and a fundamental component of student development theory classes. In the past few decades, I have seen many campuses expand their involvement opportunities and offerings based on Astin’s and others’ findings about the value of co-curricular involvement (Annual Reports and Strategic Intent: Division of Student Affairs, 2018). While every institution is organized differently, a student involvement office or unit typically oversees student-led groups that

can include a programming board, student organizations, student government, leadership development, and sometimes Greek Life. Of course, there are many other ways for students to get involved on their campus through other functional areas, such as residence life, recreation, spiritual life, and many more that are unique to each individual institution.

### **Problem Statement**

Student development, in a broad sense, is the primary purpose of colleges and universities in that higher education seeks to educate and train students who pursue college degrees. While the most apparent aspect of this purpose is the development of cognitive skills and knowledge, research has been conducted that shows that students are making just as important developmental gains outside the classroom (Kuh, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). While early research into student involvement focused primarily on retention and academic outcomes (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1986; Kuh, 1991), there has been a growing base of research that investigates student involvement and its relationship to student development (Astin 1999; Cooper, 1994; Flowers, 2004). The purpose of this project is to further expand this knowledge base by specifically examining the relationship between affiliation in a Greek Letter Organization and campus involvement.

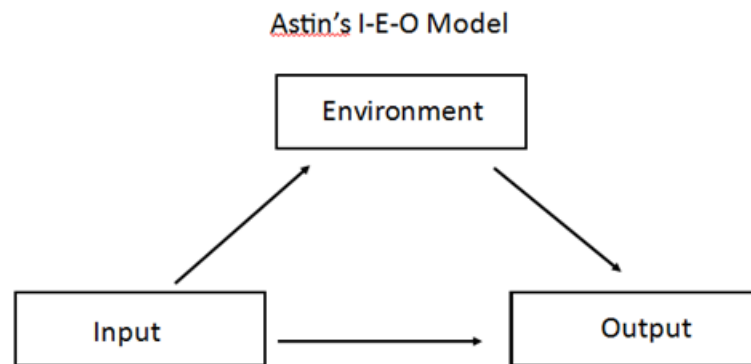
### **Conceptual Framework**

Student involvement offices can be found on most college campuses in the country. This project will use the work of Alexander Astin, specifically his 1984 Student

Involvement Theory, as the framework for the research (Astin, 1984). This theory is remarkably simple yet at the same time profound. Astin theorized that the amount of personal development and skills that students gain from an educational program is directly proportional to the quantity and quality of student involvement in that program. Astin defined involvement as “the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects” (Astin, 1984 p. 519). In this case, this involvement would be the time spent in clubs and organizations, working on the activities board, planning student government events, or other related projects. According to the theory, students who show a high level of involvement in student activities should also show significant developmental gains as well.

### **Input Environment Output Model**

Astin (1993) described a theoretical model that seeks to measure the growth or change college students experience by examining varying environmental conditions. In this model, Astin defined inputs as “characteristics of the student at the time of entry to the institution,” environment as, “various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences to which the student is exposed,” and outputs as, “the student’s characteristics after exposure to the environment” (Astin, 1993, p. 7). Astin’s I-E-O model will be used as a framework for this study with student’s characteristics before affiliating with a Greek-letter organization serving as the input, the experiences with the chapter making up the environment, and the student’s characteristics after being part of the chapter serving as the output.



*Figure 1*

*Astin's IEO Model.*

*Source: Astin (1993)*

When examining the involvement patterns of Greek-affiliated students in this study, involvement theory will be used as a conceptual framework. Based on this theory, it will be assumed that increased student involvement is a positive and desirable outcome for the institution. This study will look at how Greek-affiliated students first get involved on campus, what happens in regard to their involvement after they affiliate, and if these patterns change.

The researcher has done some preliminary work in confirming the positive outcomes of Involvement Theory at the institution where the current research was conducted. In Fall 2013, this theory was tested at Southeastern University using quantitative methods for a statistics class as part of the doctoral program. Data were collected from student involvement surveys in which students self-reported involvement levels of not involved, involved a little, somewhat involved, and very involved and the average GPA of each group was compared. Between these four different levels of

involvement, statistically significant differences in students' average GPA were identified. The difference in the average GPA between not involved and very involved was found to be almost half a point. It was affirming to discover that this quantitative research confirmed a part of student involvement theory, but it did not tell the whole story. It explained that involvement made a difference in academic outcomes, but it did not explain why. The researcher's interest in conducting qualitative research along these same lines grew out of a desire to complete the picture and help explore why or how student involvement may be impactful.

### **Purpose of Study**

The areas of Greek Life and Student Involvement are two distinct areas of research in student affairs that, despite being similar in nature, have so far had very little overlap. What has been published is limited to proving that there is a connection between Greek Life and higher student involvement or impact on retention rates (Hayek et al., 2002; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2001; Nelson, Halperin, Wasserman, Smith, & Graham, 2006). However, all of these studies are quantitative, and therefore focused on establishing this link, but not understanding how or why it occurs. Preliminary research for this study has indicated that these areas are closely related and that they have a strong influence upon each other. In a 2015 pilot study for this project, I found indicators that pointed to a complex relationship between a student's choice to affiliate with a Greek organization and their patterns of campus involvement. Affiliating with a Greek chapter created a stronger connection to campus among participants and changed how students were involved on the campus. The results of this pilot study lead to

the following questions, which were consolidated to create the final research questions in the current study:

- Does a student's involvement on campus change when they affiliate with a Greek organization?
- Does a student become engrossed in their organization, or do they become more involved on campus?
- What happens with a student's involvement in other non-Greek student organizations?
- Are students likely to pursue or maintain leadership positions in Greek organizations?
- Do students feel more connected to campus after they affiliate with a Greek organization?

The purpose of this study is to follow up on these indicators and discover how students who become involved in Greek Life experience student involvement, to see if there are differences in their involvement pre- and post-affiliation, and to see if these experiences express themselves differently. To do so, the questions from the pilot study were distilled to the two main questions. This study aims to contribute to the current literature by adding a qualitative perspective to the discussion on Greek involvement. A great deal of theoretical work has been done on a broad quantitative scale, but there is far less research on smaller scale student's involvement. This study will help fill this gap in

the literature by connecting Greek affiliation and student involvement and investigating how Greek students choose to become involved.

### **Research Questions**

This project seeks to expand the knowledge base about the relationship between Greek affiliation and student involvement by helping to answer the following research questions:

1. How does becoming affiliated in a Greek Life organization influence involvement patterns of students who choose to join them?
  - a. If there are differences, why do these changes in involvement take place?
2. How does becoming affiliated in a Greek Life organization influence a student's perceived connection to campus?

### **Significance of the Study**

As previously established, Greek Life is a topic that is often at the forefront of national news related to higher education. Unfortunately, the headline-grabbing news that seems to dominate media coverage only penetrates the social consciousness whenever something goes wrong. Because of this, student affairs professionals who work with Greek organizations must work hard to overcome these perceptions. This study will shed more light on areas of Greek Life that are not as well-known and will give those who work with affiliated students more tools to both support their students and improve their departments. In my experience, working with Greek students often involves challenging



stereotypes, changing perceptions, and building a cohesive community. Understanding the role of Greek Life in the greater university community will be valuable information to help in these tasks. It is important to understand how students' involvement changes once they affiliate because student affairs professionals can use this information to better serve students. Are they getting less involved or are they taking on too many new commitments and getting over involved? Are they retreating into organizations that are very homogenous in thoughts and values, or are they branching out and connecting to new parts of the university community? A lack of understanding, and a gap in the literature, make this a needed contribution to the field.

### **Definition of Terms**

Greek Life is a unique and different branch of student affairs practice. There are a multitude of terms and acronyms that are used on a regular basis that may not be familiar to the average reader. While this paper attempts to avoid some of the more obscure terminology, a brief list has been created below to help define unfamiliar terms.

Greek- An umbrella term that refers to a member or an organization that is fraternal in nature. Typically, these organizations are gender specific and identify themselves with two to three letters of the Greek alphabet (Syrett, 2009).

Greek Life- Greek Life or Greek Affairs offices work with students to develop accountability and personal responsibility while also working to educate students about the dangers of alcohol, drugs, and hazing. They put an emphasis on scholarship, service, and leadership (Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 2003).

National Panhellenic Conference (NPC)- A group of 26 sororities that was founded in 1902 to advocate and support their members and women's fraternal organizations (Rudolph, 1991).

National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)- A group of nine historically African American fraternities and sororities founded in 1930 for unanimity of thought and action consider matters of mutual interest (Ross, 2001).

North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC)- Founded in 1909 and represents 66 fraternities across the nation (<https://nicindy.org/about/members/>).

Student Development- Rodgers (1990) defined student development as "the ways that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education" (Rodgers, 1990 p.27).

Student Involvement- For the purposes of this project, student involvement will be defined as participation in student clubs and organizations, programming through the student union or activities board, student government, campus recreation, Greek Life, or other student led organizations. Specifically, this means effort from the student to partake in these activities (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009).

Unaffiliated- A student who has not joined a fraternal organization and is therefore not affiliated with a national organization (Syrett, 2009).

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Origins and History of Greek Life**

The origins of the American Greek system have a complex past, so it is necessary to begin with an overview of where the Greek system developed (See Figure 2). The earliest roots of Greek Life can be traced to literary societies in the colonial colleges. During this time period, literary societies were the primary social vehicle for colonial students (Torbenson & Parks, 2009). Many of these societies had secret signs, handshakes, rituals, etc. that were heavily influenced by the Masonic Order. It was out of these societies that the foundations for fraternal organizations were laid (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968). The first true Greek chapter was founded in 1776 at William and Mary by five students who adopted the Greek initials Phi Beta Kappa (Torbenson & Parks, 2009). What made Phi Beta Kappa unique and different from the literary societies was the fact that they expanded to other campuses in other states and by 1780 had chapters in twenty colleges (Torbenson & Parks, 2009). The idea of growing beyond the initial college where the chapter was founded set the stage for the expansion of chapters to colleges and universities across the country. This development was a pivotal step towards the creation of modern Greek letter chapters.

Women were a small minority in early colleges for many years, and although there are a few examples of them joining national fraternities (Torbenson & Parks, 2009),

it is much harder to pin down the first true sorority. Women's chapters first appeared at Wesleyan College, which was also the first women's college (Torbenson & Parks, 2009). Some organizations such as Alpha Delta Pi and Phi Mu grew out of literary societies and later changed their names to include Greek letters. Others held different distinctions such as Pi Beta Phi being the first chapter to expand to another campus or Kappa Alpha Theta holding the honor of the first organization to use Greek letters (Torbenson & Parks, 2009). The first group to use the term sorority was Gamma Phi Beta in 1874, which then caught on as a popular identifier as a women's chapter (Torbenson & Parks, 2009).

Another major turning point occurred in 1906 when Alpha Phi Alpha was founded on the campus of Cornell University (Ross, 2001). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, fraternal organizations filled a key role in campus life as they served as centers of housing, social life, and dining (Ross, 2001). However, African Americans were excluded from joining these organizations and the benefits that they provided to all other students (Ross, 2001). Seven African American students formed a study group in 1905 that later grew into the first chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha (Brown, Parks, & Phillips, 2005). This fraternity is considered to be the first African American fraternity founded in the country. Kimbrough (2003) mentions several other groups such as Sigma Pi Phi and Alpha Kappa Nu as having claims to be the first such chapter, as well, but they are not as prevalent in the literature as Alpha Phi Alpha. In the following years, Alpha Phi Alpha expanded to Howard University and several other campuses. Greek Life thrived at Howard, and soon many other chapters appeared on their campus (Ross, 2001).

Soon after the founding of Alpha Phi Alpha, the first African American sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, was founded on the campus of Howard University in 1908 (Torbenson & Parks, 2009). At the time, African American women were among the least likely group of people to attend college, so this represented a large step forward. Howard University was supportive of the sorority and they were chartered quickly (Ross, 2001). Because there were no existing sororities on the campus of Howard, Alpha Kappa Alpha created an organization with its own unique culture (Torbenson & Parks, 2009).

The end of the nineteenth century saw a dramatic growth in the diversity of college students and thereby a diversification of Greek organizations (Brown et al., 2005). As more students attended college who were not White and/or male, many fraternal organizations began to enforce discriminatory membership restrictions (Brown et al., 2005). However, this discrimination led to the creation of a wide variety of organizations for specific groups along religious and racial lines. Chapters were started by religious groups such as Catholics, Jews, and Mormons as well as racial minorities including Chinese and Spanish American students (Brown et al., 2005).

As a result of the growth of these organizations, a trend emerged in the early twentieth century of forming umbrella organizations that would oversee the different fraternities and sororities. The first organization was the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), which after several failed attempts, was created in 1902 to oversee sororities. This group was followed by the creation of the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) in 1909 (Brown et al., 2005). As it was with students, the African American

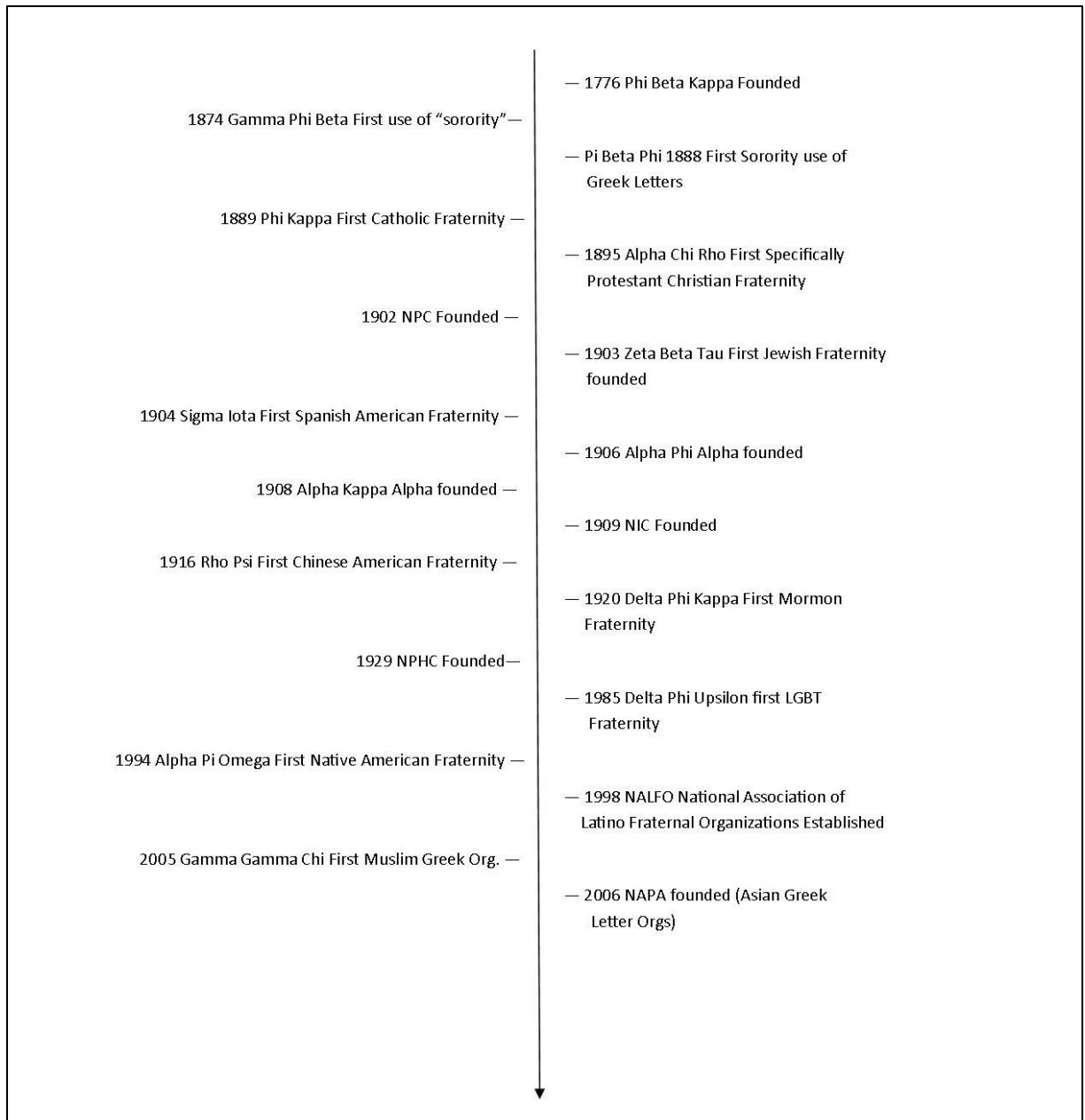
fraternities and sororities were excluded from joining these organizations and forced to create their own governing body. In response, in 1929 the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) was created (Brown et al., 2005). The NPHC, often known as the Divine Nine, offered African American chapters the benefits of a national conference that had been denied to them by the NPC and NIC councils.

All of these fraternal groups had one thing in common: they were created to fill a need to deal with a power dynamic that was set against those who founded them (Brown et al., 2005; Ross, 2001; Torbenson & Parks, 2009). In the case of White fraternities, they were established as a type of rebellion from the strict structure of the colonial college that sought to control every aspect of the students' lives in and out of the classroom. In the early colleges, students were not allowed to question authority and were also made to submit to strict moral and religious discipline (Ross, 2001). The fraternity chapter became an avenue where students could escape this structure and enjoy drinking, card playing, and singing (Torbenson & Parks, 2009). In a fraternity chapter, students found freedom, support, and socialization.

The rise of NPHC organizations was also the result of minority students finding that they were on the wrong side of a power dynamic and taking matters into their hands to create their own systems of support. While some African American students did attend the predominantly White colleges around the beginning of the nineteenth century, college policies were not exactly welcoming. Brown et al. (2005) tell of one college that required its graduates to pass a swim test but refused to allow African Americans in their pool.

The fraternity was a way of establishing a supportive structure that would help with some of the obstacles that the university refused to address. The establishment of these organizations helps to explain why the first Black Greek Letter Organization (BGLO) originated in a northern White college rather than an African American college (Brown et al., 2005). The founding of Alpha Phi Alpha was a direct response to the dismal retention rate of African Americans due to discriminatory policies at Cornell (Ross, 2001). Students banded together in a fraternity to mutually overcome the obstacles that were put in front of them.

In a similar way the founding of sororities was also an attempt to find community and support for a minority population on campus. Very few women went to college and those who did were a minority on campuses for much of the twentieth century (Torbenenson & Parks, 2009). Only a small fraction of the established fraternities admitted women, and those that did would not grant them full membership (Torbenenson & Parks, 2009). These policies prompted groups of women to start their own organizations, which eventually grew into the modern-day sororities (Torbenenson & Parks, 2009).



*Figure 2*

*A Timeline of Significant Greek Events.*

*Source:* Brown, Park, & Phillips, 2005; Brubacher & Rudy, 1968; Ross, 2001; Rudolph, 1991; Syrett, 2009



## **Defining Engagement and Involvement**

It is important to understand the difference between engagement and involvement when conducting a study of this nature. However, these terms are sometimes poorly understood, and it is easy to use them interchangeably. Some researchers use the term student engagement without ever providing a clear definition of what they specifically mean. Having a clear definition of this term is understandably important to this research. There is a very limited body of research that attempts to explore the meaning of student engagement in Greek Life. However, there is a history of these terms in a more general sense, and several authors have attempted to define them.

Alexander Astin's work is cited in much of the literature on student involvement. His (1984) Theory of Student Involvement is one of the foundational pieces on this topic. In 1993, he revised and updated his theory and defined involvement by using five specific measures: academic involvement, involvement with faculty, involvement with student peers, involvement in work, and other involvement (Astin, 1993). Astin listed student organizations as a part of involvement with student peers, and it is this category that is most relevant to my study. While he sets a specific criterium for defining involvement, he does not discuss engagement.

However, Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie (2009) recognized that problems were beginning to appear with involvement and engagement being used interchangeably and because of this lack of clarity that was created, they attempted to pull together and create a standard definition to these terms by both analyzing literature and interviewing student

affairs researchers (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). They spoke to innovators who, in their opinion, created the most influential developmental theories on college students such as Astin, Kuh, and Tinto as well as researchers who are building upon the work of these pioneers (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Drawing from interviews with influential authors and an extensive literature review, the researchers identified three terms to describe student interactions: involvement, engagement, and integration. They found that involvement primarily refers to extracurricular activities and is focused on personal choices (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). This concept of involvement differs from engagement in significant ways. The authors determined that engagement is used on the institutional level whereas involvement takes place on a personal level. Engagement is typically tied to educational outcomes and actions that the institution takes to increase student participation (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). This is an important distinction and one that is typically overlooked. Even at student programming conferences, such as The National Association for Campus Activities, it has been my observation that these terms are often used interchangeably.

A similar scholarly definition of engagement and involvement can be found in Strayhorn's (2012) book on college students' sense of belonging. As a part of this work, he needed to set his own definition of these terms. He agreed with Astin's (1999) definition of involvement, that it "connotes behaviors and actions" (Strayhorn, 2012 p. 108). Further he found engagement related to "how institutions invest resources and structure learning opportunities" (Strayhorn, 2012 p. 108) He suggested that the difference between involvement and engagement can be found at the individual and

institutional levels. He built upon Wolf-Wendell et al.'s (2009) definition by saying that engagement relates to how institutions help students to take advantage of resources and opportunities in order to gain their benefits, where involvement is specifically related to the time and effort that students invest. He further noted that engagement assumes student success in these activities where it is not always guaranteed (Strayhorn, 2012).

The definitions of involvement and engagement have evolved over the last three decades. There seems to be agreement in the literature with each subsequent author adding nuance to definitions as they build upon the previous definitions. For the purposes of this study, involvement will be defined as the personal investment of time and energy by students and engagement will be defined as institutional effort to assist students in realizing developmental gains from participation in campus activities.

### **Greeks, Involvement, and the Community**

After establishing the parameters for student involvement, the next section of this review will look at specific involvement patterns for Greek students. Most of the literature on this topic can be classified into two avenues of inquiry: Are Greek affiliated students more engaged than non-affiliated students (Hayek et al., 2002; NSSE, 2011; Patton et al, 2011) and do affiliated students show developmental gains as a result of their participation in their chapters (Carini et al., 2006; Hevel et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2015)?

Large-scale NSSE studies. The literature seems to support the idea that Greek students are overall more involved than non-affiliated students (Hayek et al., 2002;

NSSE, 2011; Patton et al, 2011). One of the best sources for data on this topic is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Much of the literature on Greek involvement uses data collected by the NSSE program. This annual survey tracks student involvement? patterns across a wide variety of schools with different findings highlighted in each annual report. The 2011 NSSE annual report looked specifically at Greek students and found that affiliated students were more likely to learn collaboratively and have better faculty interactions (NSSE, 2011). Additionally, Greeks were more likely to report that their campus offered them a supportive environment (NSSE, 2011). The authors of the report concluded that because Greeks are a part of a learning community on their campuses, they receive an individual benefit than other students do from being involved (NSSE, 2011).

Many other studies have used NSSE results which have become an important source of data for researchers interested in measuring Greek engagement. Hayek et al. (2002) used these data to compare engagement levels of Greek students to non-affiliated students, while also controlling for variables such as academic year, residence, institution type, major, sex, race, and ethnicity. They found that Greek-affiliated students consistently fared better in most of their engagement measures, particularly in effort expended towards involvement, personal growth, and perceptions of campus environment (Hayek et al., 2002). They also reported that these benefits applied to all of the sections of Greek Life that they examined, and the positive outcomes were not affected by academic class, sex, or residence (Hayek et al., 2002).

While the preceding studies are broad general studies utilizing NSSE data, there are a few publications that look into more specific situations of Greek involvement, such as Greek students at a specific institution type and of a specific race. Patton et al. (2011) measured the impact of fraternity or sorority membership on campus engagement specifically targeting African American students. The authors of this study cited the need to understand affiliated African American students' involvement patterns both at primarily White institutions as well as historically Black college and universities. As in many previous studies, the NSSE survey was the primary data source for this research. Consistent with the other NSSE sourced projects, Patton et al. (2011) found that Greek membership did have a positive relationship with the engagement outcomes that they measured. In addition to this, they also discovered that this effect was even stronger when it was measured specifically at historically Black colleges and universities (Patton et al., 2011).

### **Other Instruments and Their Outcomes**

Another national instrument that has been used to measure involvement is the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). This tool was used by Strayhorn (2012) to examine the relationship between student involvement and sense of belonging. Using data from over 8,000 students, Strayhorn found that college students who were more involved than their peers consistently reported a greater sense of belonging. One area that he specifically looked at was involvement in fraternities and sororities. He found that fraternity and sorority involvement, along with membership on an athletic team, yielded one of the higher gains in sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012).

In addition to the NSSE and CSEQ, another specific tool was used by Walker, Martin, & Hussey (2015) at Duke University and followed the classes of 2005 and 2006 through four years of college. They used a school-specific instrument (the Campus Life and Learning Project) which was developed specifically for Duke University and found that Greek affiliation resulted in higher involvement levels and a greater satisfaction with campus life (Walker et al., 2015).

Another way involvement has been explored is the ability of fraternities and sororities to create a greater sense of campus community. Cheng (2004) created an instrument to measure the effect of various activities on the overall sense of community on a campus. His survey took place on two undergraduate colleges at a private university in New York and had 1,457 participants with data pulled from a survey on student experience (Cheng, 2004). The author measured community by stating on a survey “There is a strong sense of community at this institution,” asking students to rate it on a four-point scale, and then used these data as the dependent variable. What the author found was surprising. The data revealed that membership in a fraternity or sorority had a statistically significant negative relationship between Greek participation and campus community (Cheng, 2004). Students in this study who joined a Greek chapter reported that they were less connected to the campus community. Cheng (2004) cited prior research by Spitzberg and Thorndike (1992) that suggested the amount of time required by a fraternity or sorority excluded students from participation in other campus events, which lowered their community scores.

Conflicting data were found by Pike (2003) when he found that factors related to campus engagement among fraternity and sorority members at Association of American Universities (AAU) schools. Pike (2003) used evaluation criteria that measured the supportiveness of the campus environment. The author found statistically significant differences between first-year, Greek-affiliated students compared to first-year, non-Greeks in relation to perceiving a supportive campus environment. In this case, the Greek students found the campus to be more supportive (Pike, 2003). The author noted that this difference became even more pronounced when students reached their senior year (Pike, 2003). However, Pike (2003) also noted that the study was limited in that it was conducted at AAU universities, a group of universities fundamentally different from Southeastern University.

Jacobs and Archie (2008) utilized the Sense of Community Index at one university in the Southwest to determine what factors led to an increased sense of community. After collecting data from 4,000 first year students, they used a factor analysis model to analyze the data. They found that participation in a fraternity or sorority chapter was one of the predictors of creating a sense of community among students (Jacobs & Archie, 2008). This finding seemed to contradict the findings of Cheng (2004) and fell more in line with Pike (2003). One difference in these studies is that Pike's (2003) and Jacobs and Archie's (2008) studies were conducted at public schools while Cheng's (2004) study was conducted at a private school. It is hard to say for sure why they achieved different results, but perhaps that could be a factor.

Southeastern University is a private school, so this difference could be relevant to the current study.

### **Fraternity and Sorority Studies within Diverse Organizations**

The vast majority of the research in the area of Greek involvement and sense of community tends to be from a broad sweep of all Greek organizations or focused on NPC and NIC chapters, as these tend to be the most numerous in the Greek system. There is very little data on chapters that are part of the NPHC or National Multicultural Greek Council (NMGC) councils that specifically relates to involvement or sense of community. However, Arellano (2018) began research into Greek letter Latinx organizations and the part they play in the success of these students. One of the relevant findings of the study was that the students found a strong sense of belonging through their chapters, particularly in the area of accountability. These students felt their brothers or sisters had a strong influence on their academic success and persistence through shared accountability (Arellano, 2018).

Finally, Barnhardt (2014) surveyed 9,760 students on 20 campuses across the country using a tool called the Personal and Social Responsibility Institutional Inventory (PSRI) to learn more about the effect of fraternity and sorority involvement on students' sense of personal and social responsibility. This tool measured five variables; striving for excellence, cultivating personal and academic integrity, taking seriously the perspectives of others, and developing competence in ethical and moral reasoning (Barnhardt, 2014). She found that on campuses that had Greek Life, a separate communal value and



definition of PSRI developed independent of the rest of the campus and was often different than the main student body. These findings have interesting implications for how Greek students relate to and connect with the larger community the research question relating to connection to the community among Greek students at Southeastern. In this case, it is helpful to know that there are instances where Greek students develop a separate sense of community than the rest of the campus.

The literature on Greek involvement as well as belonging and community paints a picture that generally favors positive outcomes for Greek-affiliated students when measuring these factors. Greek students were found to be more engaged than their peers (Hayek et al., 2002; NSSE, 2011; Patton et al., 2001; Walker et al., 2015). There was a small amount of disagreement on sense of belonging as the majority of studies (Arellano, 2018; Jacobs & Archie, 2008; Pike, 2003; Strayhorn et al., 2012) found that Greek participation increased sense of belonging, while Cheng (2005) and Barnhardt (2014) found that Greek affiliation had either a negative or neutral effect on sense of belonging. Finally, Bureau et al. (2011) and Carini et al. (2006) also found support for the benefits of Greek life relating to the community as they both found a connection between Greek students and a sense of a supportive campus environment. Together, this shows a generally beneficial relationship between Greek affiliation and a positive connection to the campus community. This established that there is some sort of effect, but not why it occurs. As all of the above studies were quantitative in nature, it proves the need for more qualitative work to help further understand these results and perhaps explain some of the discrepancies.

## **Greek Involvement and Academic Outcomes**

Common measures of student affairs programs that tend to be among the most visible outcomes are ones that relate to the academic mission of the university. Greek Life departments are often organizationally housed in the Student Affairs division of a college or university. Grade point average is a common metric of student success because it is easy to compare across different student groups (Ravand, 2015). Due to the importance placed on these measures, there is a significant amount of research directed towards the academic outcomes of Greek involvement. As noted below, there is much more research on this topic than any other area related to the current project. The emphasis on academic outcomes is understandable as universities want hard data and numbers. Due to their nature as institutions with educational missions, metrics such as GPAs are often used as indicators of success in student life.

One of the first researchers to study the link between Greek affiliation and academics was Pike (2003). In his work, gathered data from 6,782 students at 17 different AAU universities. He found significant gains for academic achievement between Greek and non-Greek students. He found that first-year Greek-affiliated students made slightly more academic achievement gains than non-Greek students, indicated by a slightly stronger rejection of the null hypothesis (that there were no achievement gains) for Greek-affiliated students. Among seniors he found that academic gains for affiliated students had a stronger correlation compared to a non-affiliated (Pike, 2003). It is interesting to note that the gains in academic achievement become more pronounced as students moved up in classification towards seniors for both Greeks and non-Greeks. The

study skills that students acquire over time as they develop more study skills and advance in their major can explain the increases from first-year to senior year for both groups. One item that is interesting to note is that the total gains from first-year to senior were greater for Greeks than non-Greeks (Pike, 2003). One possible implication of these findings is that the positive effect of Greek involvement may become more pronounced over time as students become more used to university life, their status as more experienced students, or the academic growth.

Similar results were found by Long (2012), who also conducted a study that examined the impact of fraternity and sorority involvement on academic performance but found the phenomenon to be positively linked. Long surveyed 1,011 students at a large, Mid-west, public university using the Fraternity/Sorority Experience Survey. It is important to note that in this research, the author chose to exclude multicultural chapters due to their different recruitment processes (Long, 2012). The author defined academic performance as the achieved grade point average of the students. The instrument that was used allowed students to self-report five various levels of involvement. He found a significant correlation between GPA and students who self-reported that they were involved with their chapter (Long, 2012). The odds of earning an A increased incrementally with each involvement level, and the odds of earning a C decreased in a corresponding manner. Unsurprisingly, he also found a negative correlation between affiliated students who use alcohol and GPA (Long, 2012). These findings tend to be compatible with the overall model of Astin's (1994) involvement theory. Astin (1984)

predicts that the more involved a student is, the more gains they will achieve. In this case, higher levels of involvement led to higher chances to make better grades.

However, Nelson et al. (2006) found data that contradicted Pike's (2003) findings in regard to Greek GPA. Nelson et al. (2006) compared data from two cohorts in the early 1990s at a private university in the northeast. Nelson et al. (2006) found that there was no significant difference in students' GPA with the exception of the semester during which students were involved in the recruitment process. During this semester, involvement with a chapter translated into a reduced GPA (Nelson et al., 2006). It is possible that these results differed from Pike (2003) due to the difference in scope between one private university and multiple AAU universities. Also, the fact that Nelson et al. (2006) used data from the early 1990s might be a factor as well. The data from Nelson et al. (2006) is of interest to my project because it also takes place at a single private university.

DeBard and Sacks (2011) collected data from 17 various institutions related to academic achievement (GPA) and student retention rates. After controlling for variables such as GPA in high school and SAT scores, they found a statistically significant positive difference in GPA between Greek and non-Greek students. This differs from the results that Nelson et al. (2006) produced and makes reaching a definitive conclusion difficult. Interestingly, the gain in GPA was higher for students who joined their chapter in the spring semester than those who joined in the fall (DeBard & Sacks, 2011). This effect was equally strong for both men and women.

One of the limitations that Nelson et al. (2006) cited in their study specifically is that their work lacked data on minority students. Sutton & Kimbrough (2001) in an earlier piece nicely filled this gap in the literature. The authors looked at many different involvement factors for African American students and their outcomes. Of particular interest to this literature review is that one of the factors that they investigated was the GPA of African American Greeks compared to non-Greeks. They found that there was a slight increase in average GPA (from 2.86 to 3.03) between non-Greeks and Greeks (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). However, they do not go beyond descriptive averages, so it is unknown if this is a statistically significant difference or not. They also note in their limitations that their sample was skewed towards female students, so their results might be more indicative of an effect on sororities more than fraternities (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001).

These results are not conclusive; however, as a similar study by Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella (2009) found the opposite effect was true in their work. They surveyed 3,153 students at a public research university. Among their results, they found that membership in a fraternity or sorority had a negligible impact on GPA in the first semester of membership, but by senior year there was a measurable negative correlation between membership and GPA (Asel et al. 2009). This result showed that students were having less academic success as they advanced in class. This finding seems to contradict the findings of Pike (2003) where he showed that Greek seniors made greater academic gains than non-Greek seniors, and that both affiliated and non-affiliated seniors had higher academic measures than first-year students. This study was, however, limited to a single

university, which may help to explain the inconsistencies with some of the other research in which it seems to be in conflict.

While the majority of the data on this topic comes from the NSSE, it is interesting to note that data from different instruments yielded different results. Hevel et al. (2015) used a different set of data, and their results were not consistent with studies done with NSSE data. The authors used data from the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNS) and examined seven different educational outcomes. They took measurements during the first and fourth years of college and found that Greek affiliation did not have a significant positive or negative impact on any of the WNS outcomes (Hevel et. al, 2015). This finding is contrary to the overall results of Carini et al. (2006), which found across-the-board benefits for Greeks. Because Hevel et al. (2015) found the different results from Caraini et al. (2006) when they examined pre-college academic ability measured through SAT scores, they concluded that Greek students of high ability gained more from participation in Greek Life than students of lower ability. However, Walker et al. (2015) also found a correlation between higher ability students and improved gains. It seems likely that since Walker et al. (2015) and Hevel et al. (2015) both used non-NSSE data, they reached a different conclusion than the NSSE studies. These different results are most likely caused by differences in the data sets and their variability. The NSSE pulls data from 751 schools and 537,605 students (NSSE, 2011) while the WNS had only 17 schools and 4,193 students participate (Hevel et. al, 2015), making for a sample size difference of more than ten times. Additionally, the WNS was a much more in-depth survey that paid participants and required two hours versus the

NSSE being much shorter. It difficult to say for sure, but it is possible that some of the differing results can be explained by the greater depth of the questions on the WNS, and also the much smaller sample size. However, these differences still lead to different conclusions in relation to Greek influence on educational outcomes.

So far, the literature has consistently established that Greek-affiliated students tend to be more engaged than their non-Greek counterparts. However, does this additional involvement translate into any educational benefits? There is a small body of literature that addresses this specific question. The previous review of research noted that the NSSE data and individual researcher's analyses of these data were the most prevalent in studies of Greek involvement and engagement. Bureau et al. (2011) drew upon NSSE data to see if Greek chapter leaders were actually showing improved student learning indicators or not. They measured five benchmarks of learning: academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and a supportive campus environment. They found that there were statistically significant positive differences in self-reported gains in all five of these benchmarks compared to non-affiliated students; however, the strength of these relationships decreased when controlling for other variables (Bureau et al., 2011). The relevant portion of these results is that Greek students reported a supportive campus community at a higher rate than their peers. This finding would seem to provide evidence that Greeks do in fact make stronger connections to their communities from increased involvement.

NSSE data were also used by Carini et al. (2006) in a similar study that measured engagement outcomes. The authors found similar outcomes to Bureau et al. (2011),but

offered more detail in some specific areas. As in Bureau et al. (2011), they found a strong correlation between highly-engaged students, and both a sense of a supportive campus environment and strong faculty interaction (Carini et al., 2006). One of the more relevant findings was that students with lower SAT scores saw more academic gains from higher involvement than students with the highest SAT scores. This research is very similar to Bureau et al. (2011) and, taken together, makes a strong case from the NSSE data for associating Greek involvement with positive developmental outcomes.

The literature was much less conclusive on Greek academic outcomes. The majority of the authors (Debard & Sacks, 2011; Long, 2012; Pike, 2003; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2011) found a positive correlation between Greek affiliation and academic success. However, both Nelson et al. (2006) and Asel et al. (2009) found that Greek affiliation had a negative impact academically. One possible explanation of the discrepancies between Nelson et al. (2006) and Asel et al. (2009) studies could have resulted the different methods they use. Nelson et al. (2006) pulled data from the 1990s and Asel et al. (2009)'s study was at only one university. While my study is not focused on academic outcomes, these data are still important as they show that Greek affiliation can have a significant impact on the success of students who join a Greek Chapter but not uniformly.

### **Greek Affiliation's Relationship to Retention and Other Measures**

In addition to GPA, and depending on institution size, some student affairs departments are charged with providing for and measuring success around the retention



and persistence of students. Retention is often cited as one of the primary measures of success for a student life department. Student affairs departments' primary mission is the successful development of students through degree completion (Annual Reports and Strategic Intent: Division of Student Affairs, 2018). For example, a Residence Life department seeks to build a safe and healthy environment where students want to live. A Student Activities office attempts to build a fun and supportive campus community. Each of these add a piece that helps to try to keep students enrolled at the college. In addition to this goal, colleges and universities invest a substantial amount of time and money into recruiting students, so there is great value in keeping these students through graduation. Any areas of student life that contribute to a higher persistence rate are very important to most institutions. In this section, we will investigate the literature related to studies that explore the impact of Greek affiliation upon retention.

In the previous section, a study was examined by DeBard and Sacks (2011) in which they tested the relationship between Greek affiliation and GPA. They pulled data from 17 different universities that included 6,115 first-year Greek students. In the same study, they also examined the retention rate of these students, while controlling for the same variables. Fraternity men who joined in the spring were retained at a 97% rate versus 92% for the fall, and 85% for unaffiliated students (DeBard & Sacks, 2011). However, when looking at women, they found that unaffiliated students did persist at a higher rate than women who joined a chapter in the fall (96% compared to 94%). However, women who joined their chapter in the spring persisted at the highest rate of 98% (DeBard & Sacks, 2011). The authors do not give a specific reason for these

differences, but they link their work to Astin (1985) and suggest that the relationship between student involvement persistence and academic success as possible causes.

Nelson et al. (2006), who also were mentioned in the previous section, also tested for a relationship between affiliation and retention rates. After controlling for precollege factors, they found that students who participated in Greek Life were retained at a 90% rate compared to 70% for the unaffiliated students in their data set (Nelson et al., 2006). A similar study was conducted by Burks and Barrett (2009) that may be more applicable to the case at Southeastern University. In their study, the authors examined the relationship between activity choices and intent to persist at religiously affiliated institutions. The results found participation in a fraternity or sorority to be one of the stronger predictors of retention (Burks & Barrett, 2009). The data were pulled from 27 faith-based institutions across the country, which fills in the gap of breadth from the previous studies. These data were particularly significant to the study at Southeastern University because it is categorized as faith-based. While the data in the literature show a positive relationship between Greek affiliation and persistence, this study shows that faith-based schools are not an outlier.

While a great deal of the literature focuses on GPA and retention as markers for positive outcomes related to Greek Life, there are many limitations to these types of measures. Hu and Wolniack (2013) took an innovative approach to this problem and attempted to measure the impact of involvement on the earnings of students after they graduated. Their work is particularly relevant to this discussion because of the four factors of social engagement that they used, participation in an event sponsored by a

fraternity or sorority was the strongest factor in their analysis. Their findings were surprising because the outcomes varied greatly by gender. They found that men who were involved in academic types of engagement had higher earnings, while women who participated in social engagement activities were more likely to have more income after graduation (Hu & Wolniack, 2013). As sorority involvement was one of the highest predictors of social involvement in this study, the findings are interesting and worth further exploration of the details of this effect.

### **Discussion**

The literature shows strong support for the case that participation in a fraternity or sorority has a positive association with student retention. However, the literature was conflicting in regard to a link between GPA and Greek participation. Most of the literature found this to be a positive link, one study found a negative link, and some found a very small to negligible effect. Because there were many different outcomes, it is not possible to draw any definitive conclusions on this subject. The data paints an overall picture of a positive relationship, but more work must be done to confirm that this is the correct assumption.

While Greek involvement outcomes produced mixed results, the literature was very clear on the topic of Greek engagement. Every study in this review found that Greeks tended to be more engaged than their peers and several, such as Walker et al. (2015), found additional benefits such as greater satisfaction with the campus environment. This research is valuable to student affairs practitioners who are looking to

both justify programs and also to create more involvement on their campus. The literature also showed that students were likely to make social and academic gains as a result of their participation in Greek Life.

As demonstrated by the current literature, there is considerable need for more qualitative research to be conducted on the topic of Greek involvement outcomes. Overall, the literature pointed to generally positive outcomes for Greek involvement, but there was some disagreement in certain areas. Some of this could be resolved through more quantitative studies, specifically more work on a national scope drawing from a variety of data sets, particularly data beyond the NSSE data. However, while the studies reviewed in this section established generally positive results for Greek involvement pertaining to retention, academics, and sense of community, there is very little understanding of how these benefits come about and what individual student experiences mean for involvement and its impact on them. There is a great need for more qualitative work in all of the areas that were reviewed during this literature review. The current study hopes to add to the overall literature by examining how Greek affiliation impacts both campus involvement and students' perceived connection to the campus by examining how and why students affiliate. As noted above, there does seem to be a positive correlation between these factors, but there has not been enough work done to understand students' individual experiences.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

The purpose of this study is to better understand how college students articulate the relationship between Greek affiliation and campus involvement. In order to answer this question, a qualitative case study methodology will be used. This chapter will outline the relevant research questions, the study methodology, proposed sampling procedures, and proposed instruments and data collection procedures.

#### **Methodology**

For this project, the most appropriate research methodology will be a case study approach. Yin (2009) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). He further defines the case as the primary unit of analysis used in a qualitative study (Yin, 2012). Because of this, a case study is useful in answering the “why” question of a particular phenomenon (Yin, 2009), and for this research, the goal is to understand why students who participate in Greek Life chose to be more or less involved on campus. A case study also offers the benefit of being able to look at the problem from different levels (Yin, 2009). This project will focus on only one campus, but the methodology could later be expanded to examine the Greek community of more colleges in future work. By using a case study

methodology, the same procedures can be applied to different campuses to expand both the scope and impact of this work.

Yin (2012) recommends choosing between four approaches to begin a case study: holistic or embedded, and single or multiple cases. Holistic refers to looking at an organization-wide perspective while an embedded study may have a separate analysis of another level within the case study. A choice also must be made by the researcher if a single-case design in which one case is used within the overall design, or if multiple cases from differing organizations will be used (Yin, 2012). For this study, a holistic, single case study will be used. The organizational level will be Southeastern University (holistic case) and the case level will be Greek affiliated students (single case). While this case could be further divided down to the chapter level, that is not within the scope of this project, as my research question seeks to understand overall Greek involvement patterns, and sorting by chapter will likely not yield the best answers to those questions.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the theoretical lens that will be used for this case study will be Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory. This theory states that generally, students who are more involved report higher gains academically and socially. This theory serves as an excellent lens. By using Astin's (1993) IEO model to further understand the experiences of students in various involvement activities, we can gain a better understanding of changes related to the outputs of their investments. Yin (2012) recommends that a theoretical perspective does not need to be a complex theory, but instead needs to "suggest a simple set of relationships" (p. 9). Involvement Theory fits this definition very closely particularly for this study. It models students' experiences of

Greek Life and the ways they understand the evolution of their involvement in their chapter. The next section details a pilot study that was conducted to see if this would be the case before the main project was conducted.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study for this project was conducted in the fall of 2014 and expanded upon in the spring of 2015. The initial phase was conducted with Alpha chapter, a sorority at Southeastern. The research consisted of a total of six interviews and three observations conducted over the course of the academic year. The purpose of these observations was to better understand how these events impacted involvement. The first was at a chapter meeting, the second was at the homecoming parade, and the final observation was at the Greek Talent Show. I chose these settings intentionally, as the first one would give me insight into how the chapter planned for events that would interact with the campus community, and the latter two would be events in which the chapter would be very visible. It was hoped that these observations would add context to the interviews. In the spring of 2015, the scope was expanded to include Gamma chapter, also a sorority, and Epsilon chapter, a fraternity. The pilot study provided results that warranted further research. Three major themes emerged from the pilot study: students who participated in Greek Life formed a stronger connection to the campus; students developed a greater sense of accountability to their organizations; and sorority members did not experience a decrease in other campus involvement, while fraternity members did.

When choosing students to interview, I wanted to be purposeful in whom I selected. I wanted to find students who had a story to tell and who would be willing to open up and share the details of their involvement on campus. I wanted to investigate the change in involvement that took place over time, so I also needed students who were a part of campus before Greek Life was established in the Fall of 2013. This would allow me to compare their responses about their involvement before they became affiliated to their involvement afterwards. Each participant was found by contacting the chapter presidents and asking them to identify members who might be good candidates. In some cases, such as Alpha chapter, the president chose to participate. In other cases, they recommended other students to contact. After the pilot study with Alpha chapter, I contacted the presidents of the three other chapters on campus and asked them to recommend students from their chapter to participate in the study.

I also used the snowball sampling technique and asked students whom I interviewed if there were any other people in their chapter that they thought would be good candidates to interview. Using this technique, I contacted two other students from Alpha chapter, both of whom also held leadership roles in the organization. I also identified a second student from Gamma chapter in this manner. The pilot study included a total of six participants from three different chapters, two males and four females.

Some examples of the questions asked during the interview included:

“Tell me about your connection to the campus now. Do you feel more-or-less connected than before? Why?”



“What kind of activities are you involved in now, and how they differ from before you were affiliated?”

“How do you spend your free time now?”

“Tell me about your leadership experience. How has your experience with your chapter impacted you as a leader?”

The questions were targeted towards the research question, with the goal of discovering whether or not students noticed any changes in their involvement on campus since their affiliation. There was a total of 10 questions presented in a semi-structured manner. For the most part I tried to stick to the questions on the script, but if a student gave an interesting or relevant answer, I followed up with an additional question to further that response. Interviews lasted between 10 and 30 minutes depending on the participant. One of the participants had a lot to say, and her interview lasted much longer than the other participants.

After all data were collected, I went through each of the interviews to look for common themes. If a particular theme came up more than once I added it to a list of topics gained from the research. From there, common groups of responses were categorized into more general themes that were common among several of the students who participated. For this process I used Creswell's (2013) data analysis spiral to sort down the data into prevalent themes. This process will be described in further detail in the next section. These themes were used to develop a coding system to help highlight

these themes. The following codes were used during this process to represent these themes:

*Table 1*

*Pilot Study Themes*

Connection to Campus	CON
Importance of Philanthropy	PHIL
Retaining of Involvement	RET
Accountability to Chapter	ACC
Increase of Involvement	INV

Additionally, if the reverse occurred and the student reported a negative impact the line was coded with a negative sign indicator. From here, the coded data were compiled to generate the final conclusions. This process included the same process described in the methods section below

The current study was not intended to replicate the pilot study, but instead will it use the pilot as a jumping off point for further investigation. The pilot study served to test the basic processes of the proposed study and to confirm that this is a relevant line of inquiry. The interview questions that were used in the pilot study were refined and narrowed to generate the interview protocol for the current study. The importance of

connection to campus and the ideas around increasing and retaining involvement were identified and incorporated into the research question for the main study.

### **Research Questions**

As stated in Chapter One, this study sought to expand the knowledge base about affiliated students' experiences in Greek Life and student involvement by exploring two distinct research questions:

1. Does becoming affiliated in a Greek Life organization influence involvement patterns of students who choose to join them?
  - a. If there are changes in involvement why do they take place?
2. How does becoming affiliated in a Greek Life organization influence a student's perceived connection to campus?

### **Study Participants**

Participants in this study were full-time, undergraduate students who are currently affiliated with a Greek letter organization. To differentiate their experiences from unaffiliated students, participants must have been a member of their organization for at least one semester. Participants were selected from a diverse variety of organizations and background as detailed in the table below.

### **Participant Profile**

Table 2 below displays the basic information about all the participants in the study. There were five female students and three male students. Each council at

Southeastern was represented in the study, with NPC accounting for 3 participants, NIC having 2 participants, and a local chapter not affiliated with any of the large councils, and NPHC each having 1 participant. Seven of the participants were White and one participant was Black. The majority of the participants were upper classmen with three seniors, four juniors, and one sophomore.

<p><i>Table 2</i></p> <p><i>Participants, Affiliations, and Demographic Profiles</i></p>					
Name	Chapter	Chapter Type	Class	Gender	Race
Jessica	Alpha Chapter	NPC	Senior	Female	White
Sarah	Alpha Chapter	NPC	Senior	Female	White
James	Beta Chapter	NPHC	Sophomore	Male	Black
Emily	Gamma Chapter	Local	Senior	Female	White
Stephanie	Delta Chapter	NPC	Junior	Female	White
Matthew	Epsilon Chapter	NIC	Junior	Male	White
Daniel	Zeta Chapter	NIC	Junior	Male	White
Rebecca	Delta Chapter	NPC	Junior	Female	White

Jessica is a White, senior, female member of Alpha chapter, an NPC sorority. She served as chapter president and held a few smaller leadership roles since joining her first year of college. She is also a first-generation college student. She had previously been involved in SGA and was the president of a club related to her academic major.

Sarah was also a member of Alpha chapter, who joined during her first year. She was also a senior and joined Alpha chapter because she was interested in sisterhood. She

held a vice president position in the chapter. Previously, she had been involved in campus ministry and the Campus Activities Board (CAB), but had to drop CAB due to her duties in Greek Life.

James is a Black male who is a charter member of Beta chapter, an NPHC fraternity. He was the youngest participants and was a sophomore who joined his chapter his first year at the institution. He served as the chapter's vice-president. He was also involved in the choir, an academic major club, an athletic booster club, and club sports. He joined his chapter because of the opportunity to be a founder of a new chapter at Southeastern.

Emily is a White female who is a member of Gamma chapter, the only local chapter at Southeastern. She was a senior who joined Gamma chapter as a sophomore. She held a senior chair position in the chapter previously, but seniors rotate off in their last semester, so she currently is not serving in a leadership position. Emily did not plan to join a Greek chapter but encountered members of the sorority one day on campus and was invited to participate in a prayer walk with them. After that she felt welcomed into the group and later joined. She was involved in a political club, the admissions office, and CAB but had to drop her involvement in both CAB and her club.

Stephanie was a junior who is a charter member of Delta chapter, a NPC sorority. She originally was going to join Alpha chapter but decided not to because so many women were at recruitment. The next year Delta chapter colonized (created a new chapter), and she decided on the spur of the moment to apply for recruitment for Delta

chapter and was accepted. She held a leadership position in her academic major club and also works an off-campus job related to her major.

Matthew is a White male who was a member of Epsilon chapter, an NIC fraternity. He is a transfer student from a two-year school and came in this year as a junior. He was the chapter vice president, but shortly after the interviews he became chapter president. He briefly joined his academic major club, but got very involved in SGA, and was elected to a senior leadership position in that organization.

Daniel is a White male who is a member of Zeta chapter, an NIC fraternity. He is a first-generation college student and was currently a junior. He was very involved in campus and has been a part of SGA, holds a leadership position in CAB, and serves as an orientation leader and peer mentor. He also has three jobs, one of which relates to his academic major.

Rebecca is a White female and is a member of Delta chapter. She was a junior and joined her chapter during her sophomore year and held a vice president position. She was not involved in any activities until she heard that Delta chapter was coming to Southeastern. She was considering transferring but decided to stay and get involved in campus programs because she wanted to be accepted by Delta chapter. She joined the student alumni club and is still active in that club.

### **Sampling**

This study used a purposeful sampling technique as the primary method of identifying potential participants. Creswell (2013) suggests a purposeful sampling

technique be used when the researcher wishes to select specific participants at the study site because they will be able to better inform the study. Specifically, a typical case selection strategy was used for this study. The research questions aim to understand the experience of a typical Greek-affiliated student at one particular university, and typical case selection is useful in understanding what is “normal and average” (Miles & Huberman, 1994 p. 28). Due to my knowledge of the program, this type of selection strategy served the purposes of the study most effectively.

Presidents from each campus chapter were contacted via email and asked if they could recommend students from their chapters who met the study requirements. Good candidates were defined as students who met all the study requirements, had been or were currently involved outside of their chapter in other areas of the campus, and had the ability and time to commit to a one-hour interview. Students who had a variety of backgrounds from other participants were important because the study seeks to find the typical student experience. As most college students exhibit their own types of diversity, it was important to include a range of students to find a “typical” experience. A priority was made to select participants from a diverse pool of chapter types. However, the NPHC chapters at Southeastern are very small and only one student from them was willing to participate. A saturation point was reached at eight interviews, during which it seemed as if there would not be any new themes developing. Creswell (2013) recommends 4-5 interviews for a case study, but I continued to hear different perspectives until the eighth interview.

Participants were drawn from a variety of Greek-letter organizations that make up the Greek community at the study site. Special consideration was given to participant selection to ensure that participants represented a variety of gender and racial backgrounds that are present at Southeastern University. In addition, special efforts were made to include chapters of each of the three different councils present at Southeastern, consisting of Panhellenic Conference, Interfraternity Council, and National Pan-Hellenic Council, and local chapters not affiliated with the large national councils.

### **Study Site**

Southeastern University is a small, private, co-educational, religiously-affiliated university in the Southeast. The main campus offers majors, tracks, and concentrations in the liberal arts, sciences, and professions across multiple professional schools. The university has a full-time enrollment (FTE) of 6,800 students. Since its founding, Southeastern had not hosted fraternal organizations on campus other than graduate organizations and honor societies. However, there are over sixty clubs and organizations on campus. In 2011, the university began conducting research that showed significant student demand for Greek Life, and as a result, began to further investigate the possibility of creating a program. The results indicated that a lack of a Greek system put Southeastern at a distinct disadvantage when compared to peer institutions in the Southeast. Every college on the peer institution list offered an extensive Greek experience for their students. Some institutions had extensive histories with Greek organizations, going back to the founding of four National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) sororities on their campus. With this in mind, a decision was made in late 2012 to create a



new Greek Life office on campus and begin the process of chartering fraternal organizations and developing an institutional program to support them as they grew. As of 2017, Southeastern hosts seven Greek chapters, one colony, and one pre-colony interest group. There are representatives from NPC, IFC, NPHC, a local chapter, and a multi-cultural organization among the Greek organizations at Southeastern. These specific chapters represent a broad spectrum of the main types of Greek organizations.

### **Data Collection**

Before data collection began, IRB approval was obtained from both The University of North Carolina at Greensboro and Southeast. A copy of the IRB approval letters can be found in Appendix B. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with students by the investigator (See Appendix C). The interview protocol that was used is listed in Appendix A. Interviews were recorded and stored on a password protected laptop. Interviews were then transcribed by the investigator, and personally identifying data were removed from the transcripts. The copies of the transcripts were stored on UNCG's cloud based, password protected box system. The pilot study revealed that the best data came from these interview sessions, as the students' own voices tended to provide the most significant data to answer the research questions.

The researcher has been employed at Southeast University for 12 years in a role that supervised the Greek system since its creation. This is important to note as there is a significant power dynamic that could create issues. However, the questions on the interview were not difficult or uncomfortable questions. In fact, it was the opposite,

students were excited to share their experiences and truly enjoyed talking about their chapters. Again, it should be noted that students that responded to the call for participants were all chapter leaders that likely had very good experiences and were enthusiastic about sharing their stories.

### **Coding**

The coding method that was used in this project was the data analysis spiral described by Creswell (2013). Creswell uses five steps in this process; organizing, reading and memoing, coding, interpreting, and visualizing (Creswell, 2013). In the first step, the data were transcribed by the researcher into Microsoft Word files that were organized in to transcripts of each interview and stored on a password protected laptop. Next, the researcher printed out each interview and began making notes on the margins of each page as part of the reading a memoing. As Creswell (2013) recommends, phrases and key concepts were written down in the margins during this step. Key concepts were ideas that seemed to be related to the research questions and were relevant to the study. After this, the codes from the pilot study were reviewed as a starting point, but were not directly used to create the new codes. During the pilot study the following codes were developed: Connection to Campus (CONN), Importance of Philanthropy (PHIL), Retaining of Involvement (RET), Accountability to Chapter (ACC), and Increase of Involvement (INV). Occurrences and frequency of each note and memo was noted, but not necessarily counted. Creswell (2013) discourages counting as it leads to a more quantitative approach and implies that all codes should be weighted equally. During the coding phase, the notes were reviewed and 28 different tentative codes were developed.

Creswell (2013) recommends that researchers do not use more than 20-25 codes during this step, so this was an adequate number. During this process notes were written on the transcripts of each interview. From here they were compiled into the 28 tentative codes, and the number corresponding to each transcript was recoded below the code for future reference.

<i>Table 3</i>
<i>Original Codes Before Narrowing</i>
Negative perception originally
Looking for involvement or leadership for life skills
Interested in Greek leadership to make a difference or serve
Got a job out of involvement
Interested in sisterhood or brotherhood
Interested in involvement because always involved
Connected via social media
Connected to other campus involvement through Greek Life
Decreased involvement or focused involvement
Increased Involvement
Wide involvement to narrow or focused
Involvement stayed the same
Faith
Natural leader/wanted to lead
Wanted to join because of legacy status
Connections via other Greeks
Connected to campus via academic department
Got more involved by holding a chapter leadership position
Connected specifically through an academic club
Involvement is connected to specific people
Mostly associates with other Greeks
Got involved because of interest in philanthropy
Connected to new parts of campus through Greek Life
More connected now
Connected before Greek Life
No involvement before affiliating

Connected via a class
Decline in involvement because of Greek Life

From here these ideas were reduced and combined into the seven themes which will be discussed in the next chapter by looking for commonalities among each of the codes. The next step is interpretation in which “involves abstracting out beyond codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2013 p. 187). In this step, the researcher developed a draft of ideas of ways in which the themes fit together and their connections to the research question. The final phase of the spiral according to Creswell (2013) is representing the data. In this case, an interview matrix was developed that linked specific quotes from the participants to each of the themes. This matrix was used to help develop and write the next chapter of this dissertation.

After the coding process was completed, the following themes emerged from the data: more focused involvement, new connections to campus, connection through academics, motivations for deeper Greek involvement, connection to campus strengthens, brotherhood and sisterhood, and connecting through faith and values. These themes will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

### **Validation**

Creswell (2013) prefers to use the term validation over terms like verification, trustworthiness, and authenticity because it emphasizes that it is a process. He lists eight strategies that can be used for validation; I will not list all of them here, but instead will describe the strategies that were used in this study.

One of the first strategies that was used in this study was prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Creswell (2013) describes this strategy as, “building trust with the participants, learning the culture, and checking for misinformation that stems from distortions” (pp. 250-251). Although it can be limiting as described above, in this case, the researcher has a great deal of experience with some of the participants and the campus culture. These experiences made it easy to make sure no misunderstandings based on interpretations were introduced into the data.

Another strategy that was used was member checking. Creswell (2013) says that this is one of the most important techniques to be used. This strategy involves taking the data and analysis back to the participants to see if it is accurate. Due to the schedule of the participants, only one of the participants was able to meet with me to review the interpretations that were made. However, in our discussion, he confirmed that the conclusions seemed accurate and that the interpretations were valid.

Finally, clarifying the researcher bias is also a strategy that Creswell (2013) identifies to increase validity. In this case, the researcher has an unusual position in that I have never been a member of a Greek institution. In fact, prior to working with Greek students, I held a fairly negative bias towards Greek institutions due to some past experiences and observations. In college I fell into the group that thought Greeks were simply students who were “buying their friends.” However, in graduate school, one of my friends from home was attending the same school as an undergraduate and was a member of a Greek chapter. I spent some time with the members, and I saw that they truly lived out their values, and after observing them my perspective began to change. Now, after

working professionally with Greek students, I hold a position that there are benefits to the Greek system, but there are also serious flaws that need to be repaired for the system to continue. I tend to be an optimist and think that student affairs professionals will be successful in helping these students to change the culture, especially in the light of the alternative if the culture does not change. I think this perspective does in fact shape my approach to this study, as I hope to discover benefits to Greek involvement in order to show that it is worth the effort to bring about change. In summary, Creswell (2013) recommends using at least 2 strategies to increase validation. While some of his strategies were not feasible for this study, the three methods above should add to the overall accuracy of the study.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to discover how and why the nature of the relationship between participation in Greek Life and Student Involvement expresses itself in college students. This was investigated through interviews with eight students that were Greek affiliated at a small private university in the Southeast. To accomplish this purpose, the following two research questions were posed:

1. How does becoming affiliated in a Greek Life organization influence involvement patterns of students who choose to join them?
  - a. If there are differences, why do these changes in involvement take place?
2. How does becoming affiliated in a Greek Life organization influence a student's perceived connection to campus?

The findings related to these questions were analyzed and are summarized in Table 4. This chapter will go into detail on the themes that emerged and how they related back to the research questions. There were seven themes that emerged from the interviews that connected back to changes in involvement and connection to campus.

<i>Table 4</i>	
<i>Research Themes</i>	
Research Question	Themes
Connection	Creating Connections to Campus through Greek Life that didn't exist before
Connection	Connection to campus is initially strong, but grows even stronger after affiliation
Connection	Prior to affiliation, students primarily connect to campus through their academic major.
Connection	Connect to chapter through values/faith
Involvement	Wide involvement becoming more focused after Greek affiliation
Involvement	Importance of Brotherhood/Sisterhood for becoming involved in Greek Life
Involvement	Motivation for deeper involvement in Greek Life
	Sub-theme a) Serving other students/legacy
	Sub theme b) Gaining useful skills or connections

### **Connection Prior to Affiliation.**

When investigating how students' involvement changed, it was important to establish how they became connected to the campus during their first few semesters. A question on the interview protocol was dedicated to determining their connections, and surprisingly almost all of the students responded the same way. This major theme emerged in the analysis because a clear pattern of how the participants first became involved in.

Students reported that prior to affiliation, they primarily connected to campus and became involved through their academic major. Of the eight participants, seven described an involvement opportunity related to their academic major among their first avenues of involvement on campus. Additionally, they reported that most of the friends they made were through the classes in their chosen major. Although residence halls were reported to



be a source of social connection by some of the participants, academic major involvement was significantly more prevalent. Graunke & Woosley (2005) suggested that first-year students tend to connect with their school primarily through first-year programs while upper-class students form connections through their academic major and leadership roles. They found that for sophomores, connection was from a more global perspective that may lead to a weaker connection (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). The findings in this study tended to show that students made more leadership connections as juniors and seniors and made more academic connections in their first year.

Within this theme, there were two sub-themes that emerged: linking campus connection to class or academic major and finding involvement through a major specific student club. Of the seven students who reported involvement during their first year at school, two of them mentioned connecting to campus through their major specific classes. Two of them discussed connecting to the university through clubs that were focused towards other students with the same major. The remaining four participants made statements that connected to both of these sub-themes.

### **Involvement**

One theme that emerged was particularly relevant to Research Question 1 (How does becoming affiliated in a Greek Life organization influence involvement patterns of students who choose to join them, and why do these changes in involvement take place?) A theme developed around the idea of involvement patterns and significant change after affiliation. Most of the participants described participating in a wide variety of activities during their early years of college and then reported a much more focused involvement as

they took senior leadership roles in their chapter. Participants reported both a lack of time due to chapter obligations as well as declining interest in their previous activities. This pattern was consistent across six of the eight participants. Different degrees of decline in involvement were reported across the interviews with some participants describing a major decline in involvement, but the majority losing only a few involvement activities.

The type of involvement most likely to decline in response to increased Greek responsibilities were volunteer roles within student involvement organizations. Two students reported stepping back from their roles in the Campus Activities Board, and one student reported choosing not to continue his role in Student Government. Ministry groups, clubs, and an on-campus job were also pushed out by Greek Life. Table 5 below describes the various types of organizations with which students felt that they could no longer continue.

<p><i>Table 5</i></p> <p><i>Participants' Involvement Loss</i></p>	
Student	Involvement Lost
Jessica	None
Sarah	Activities Board and Ministry Group
James	Gospel Choir
Emily	Activities Board and College Republicans
Stephanie	None
Matthew	Academic Major Club
Daniel	Student Government
Rebecca	On-campus Job

## **Involvement Loss**

Emily reported the most loss of involvement of the participants. She saw this as a positive and part of a growth process and recommended future students take a similar approach, saying

So, I think, just encouraging students to, you know, take a breath, maybe put your name on a handful of different organizations that first semester and let yourself try them out and then slowly weed through them and then invest in a key, a couple key organizations. I think that's the biggest tip because, like we said earlier, you know, you don't have endless time. You have to pick and choose what you invest in.

This was a similar sentiment expressed by other participants as well. Emily also described her specific experience of having to drop some involvement saying,

Yeah, so, like I said, College Republicans kind of fell. Unfortunately, CAB did too, just because, I, it was interesting and fun but I just didn't think, with the other stuff I was involved in, that I would be able to be a super influential member and that's what I wanted. I wanted to feel like I was able to make a difference and contribute.

In Emily's case, she described wanting to participate in more things, but having to make difficult choices as her responsibilities to the chapter increased, and she wanted to be involved in the most impactful way.

Of the six students who saw declines in involvement, three of them reported that they wanted to continue with their previous organizations but had to make decisions based on priorities. Sarah illustrated her decision-making process, saying,

I was involved in CAB my first semester Freshman year. I loved that but then once I got involved in my chapter, I kind of had to choose my priorities a little bit more and went with Greek Life.

Emily and Daniel reported a similar experience to Sarah. They wanted to be involved in everything they had been before, but there simply wasn't enough time. All three students described having to make tough decisions about what organization was the most valuable and important to them. In each case, their Greek chapter took first priority and other areas of involvement were cut out instead. Daniel was one of the most involved students and had several commitments to juggle. He described how he came to decide which was the greatest value to him, saying

I mainly left Student Government because I was prioritizing my time with things that I was interested in. I really wanted to focus on my grades but keep involved in things that I loved, and I thought that Student Government wasn't quite the thing that I loved. So, I had between Greek Life, CAB, and Student Government, I let Student Government go because the other ones were a bigger priority to me.

His comments indicate that there was a sub-theme where students were confronted with decisions about which major involvement pieces to keep. Student Government and Campus Activities Board are large commitments that require significant time commitments. They were often able to keep smaller commitments, such as academic major clubs, but had to make tough decisions when it came to larger involvement roles.

Jessica and Stephanie did not report any loss of involvement after joining their chapters. Stephanie told me, "I don't think anything has really slacked off since I've joined Delta Chapter like organizational-wise, like other extracurricular activities." There

did not appear to be any significant differences in these students other than perhaps personal attitudes and time.

### **Involvement Patterns and Connections to Campus**

A second theme emerged from the interviews that was relevant to both research questions (involvement patterns and connection to campus). Every participant in the study spoke of creating connections to campus through Greek Life that did not exist before they affiliated. These connections could be broken down further into sub-themes of connecting to Greek students in other chapters that they would not have met otherwise and connecting to new non-Greek parts of campus that they would not have encountered. In all, every participant reported increased connections through one or both of these vectors.

### **Connecting to Campus Through Greek Affiliation**

One of the ways in which Greek affiliation opened new connections to the campus was by students' interacting with other non-Greek organizations through bonds formed within the chapter. This phenomenon manifested itself in different ways across the participants. For example, Jessica described how she would go to more events than before because she wanted to support her sisters.

It's definitely different now because I'm in more meetings, I'm you know getting lunch or dinner with way more people and hanging out, and oh, one of my sisters teaches a class. I'm going to go to that, or one of my sisters is speaking at something, and I just want to like, support them. So, there's always something for me to be doing in the organization.

In a similar way, Daniel found that his brothers in his chapter would recommend him for positions that he would not have considered applying for without their push. As we discussed this, he told me,

People that I knew, and a lot the cases it was Greeks that I knew because the Greek Life community is so close together that when people think you are good for something, they tell you about it and they will help you get involved in those other kinds of ways.

Both of these new interaction opportunities hinged on Greeks supporting each other on one end (Jessica was supporting the sisters in her chapter), and on the other end the student (Daniel) was being supported by his brothers and encouraged to take on roles he did not know about.

Rebecca made connections in yet another way, in anticipation of joining her chapter. She told me about how she had never been involved in anything at school, and worried that she would not get selected by her chapter due to lack of involvement. She rushed out to join as many things as possible her sophomore year to make her more attractive to the chapter. In her own words, she described the change like this:

I feel, I find myself being more, like, more motivated to go to, like, student activities and stuff. So, like, for example, my freshman year, they during Welcome Week, how CAB does all the fun, like, stuff during Welcome Week. I didn't go to any of [Welcome Week activities] my freshman year. I went to none of it because I was like, what is the point? Why would I do that? That is so stupid. But then my sophomore year, like, I started, I was like, oh my God. This is my year. Like, Delta Chapter is going to be colonizing. Like, I'm going to branch out. I'm going to be excited. And so, I went to all the stuff. Like, I freaking went and played BINGO and I hate BINGO. We just, like, had a group of people, and we all went together.

This case was interesting in that Rebecca had not even joined her chapter but was motivated to get more involved simply because she knew the chapter that she wanted to join valued involvement and looked to recruit sisters that shared those values.

Participants also reported an increase in campus connection by establishing relationships with other Greek students who they would normally not encounter on campus. Some connected by building close relationships within their chapters while others formed bonds with students across all of the Greek community. Matthew exemplified this process. He talked about how he primarily connects with the other men in his fraternity and friends in Student Government, and that even though he is involved in other places, his main connection is through these organizations. He described it saying,

Well, living at a fraternity house, you always have your brothers around, so we're always doing something... there's not, like, too many people outside of Greek Life or SGA that I hang out with. Uh, there's a couple, there's a few, but, mainly people within my organizations. I connect with them.

Daniel, however, said that he connects with Greeks from other chapters even more so than members of his fraternity saying, "A lot of my friends, they are still Greeks, they are just not in my fraternity. They are in the sororities and a lot of the other fraternities." His affiliation with Greeks other than those in his chapter was unique in that Daniel connected more to other chapters, but the idea of Greek community was consistent throughout the interviews. Jessica associated more with Greeks than non-affiliated students because she is around them much more than not. One of the most common ways

that participants connected to the campus prior to affiliation was through residence halls; however, Sarah described how the Greek community had replaced this connection, saying, “I think that our Greek Life Community is really close and connected, and so a lot of, instead of my suitemates or my roommate, a lot of my friends are in that community.” It makes sense that students would make connections to the people that they are surrounded by the most, and it presents an interesting change in how students develop new connections to the campus.

### **Linking campus connection to class.**

Most of the participants indicated that one of their first involvement experiences was connecting to a club that related to their major. Emily became active in this manner during her first semester on campus. She told me,

I was part of the College Republicans Club and the Public Affairs Club, and those really geared a lot to, towards my majors and what I was studying because I thought it'd be a good way to acclimate me to that environment. So that's a lot of what I spent my time with that first year.

Similar experiences were shared by Jessica, James, Stephanie, and Matthew. At the time, Greek chapters were not able to recruit until the spring semester. Jessica felt like an academic club was the only way she could get involved on campus. She joined her major club that semester and is now serving as the president of that organization in addition to her role within her chapter.

Students also indicated that before they became members of their Greek chapter, they believed that students connected primarily through their academic departments.



Meeting people through classes and labs was mentioned by five of the eight participants.

Stephanie described it this way, saying,

For connecting to people that are not in Greek life, it's through major basically because we're all in the same classes and the classes are, they are not super big but our labs, you get to know people in your labs because so it's really close, the lab cap is like twenty people.

Daniel commented that he had a lot of friends outside of Greek Life, and he met them "mainly through my major, and some of them through the on-campus jobs that I have."

Whereas Daniel connected through his major and jobs and maintained those relationships, Matthew was only briefly involved in his major club, and then he turned internally towards his organization. He told me,

You know, some people always stay close to their degree program because they like the people in their degree program. Umm, you know, for me, joining a fraternity, I connected with the guys there, and that's what made me become a Greek member of that organization.

He went on to later talk about how he connected almost exclusively with the men in his chapter.

Rebecca was the only one who didn't talk about any academic connections to the campus. She stated that she intentionally did not try to connect with the campus at all because she planned to transfer the next year. As a result, she had no connection to the campus during her first year. Her case is an interesting outlier. Rebecca missed out on the connections the other students made and would likely have transferred to another school if she had not encountered Greek Life. After deciding to give involvement in Greek Life

a chance, she quickly reconnected to the campus. However, because of her divergent involvement pattern, she never connected through her academic department. In fact, she spoke about how she had not made any effort to connect to activities anywhere on campus.

### **Why Students Become Involved in Organizations**

To better understand the responses to the research questions, it is important to understand what motivates students to become involved and invest in their organizations. While analyzing the interviews, a theme developed around motivation for deeper involvement in Greek Life. All but one participant spoke about individual motivations for both joining and further investing in their chapter. The responses to this theme can be broken down into two sub-themes: motivation for involvement in Greek Life as an opportunity to make a difference or impact as a leader and motivation for involvement in Greek Life to build social, academic, or career skills. Students valued the skills they gained and the impact they had on others both inside and beyond their chapters. Students also chose to affiliate with other students who shared their values. These students were looking for their place and were able to find it through the bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood that these chapters offered.

#### **Motivation for leadership and service.**

Some of the participants were more motivated to get involved and pursue a leadership position from a desire to serve their peers and make a difference. Students who fell into this sub-theme wanted to give back and often to help mentor students who were new to the chapter. Jessica, Emily, and Daniel all expressed motivations that fell into this

category. Jessica was very excited about getting to help guide and teach the junior members of her chapter. She stated,

As President, like you get the opportunity to help and to mentor and guide all of the positions, instead of just focusing on one specific one. Um, I really love the girls, and I thought it was a really good opportunity to like help them and like lead them in a way. I think like being in Greek Life and having a leadership position is really important, if that's something that you ever like wanted to have... I really like being able to like help other girls like.

Emily also felt that her motivation for being a Greek leader was developing her sisters, saying,

I knew coming into college that I wanted to invest in other people. So, I'd say that was one of the biggest things that I tried to spend my time doing other than your typical schoolwork and any clubs that I was a part of, which was making sure I was building those relationships.

Additionally, she went on to talk about the opportunity to not only support her sisters, but to use her position to make a difference outside of her chapter as well.

### **Motivation relating to developing new skills.**

Another set of students were more motivated by the potential skills they could gain from their involvement in Greek Life. These students saw the perceived benefits in academic, social, or career skills as a valuable motivation. Sarah saw the potential benefits of building real world skills saying,

I think that Greek Life has really given me an opportunity to supplement what I learn in class and apply that, and really like get more life skills outside of the classroom... I'm a Public Relations major, and so I've really been able to use a lot of my communication skills, and marketing and just kind of organizational skills

to lead a group, also plan events and facilitate different like leadership things, and things like that.

This practical use for skills gained through Greek leadership was also reported by Matthew, who said that he pursued leadership

to make a difference, in the world and, then, you know, any type of leadership opportunity you have, you can make a difference, wherever you're at. And then also a resume builder. Like, being a philanthropy chair, you get involved in nonprofit organizations. They start seeing your name. You start putting that on your resume. Future employers are like, wow, this person really likes to be involved, really likes to help out their community.

This statement is an example of a hybrid between both of the sub-themes, as Matthew expressed a desire to both make a difference as well as to gain skills that will help with future employment.

One of the goals of this research project was to understand not only if students became more connected to their campus after affiliating but also to understand why. To determine this connection, participants were asked how connected to the campus they felt during their first semesters here. I had expected some very mixed results that included responses ranging from a little connection to no connection. I was very surprised when all but one of the students said that they felt a moderate to strong connection right away. Rebecca who has been an outlier on other themes as well, reported no connection at all when she first arrived on the campus, saying that she did not have a group of friends with whom she connected. This line of inquiry developed into another theme: connection to campus is initially strong but grows even stronger after affiliation. Some students had a

legacy connection to campus that helped them feel more connected. Sarah had grandparents who were alumni, so she focused on this link when thinking about how connected she was. Other students such as, James, Emily, and Matthew felt welcomed and part of the community from the first time they toured the campus. James summed up this line of thinking saying,

I just liked that family feel, my mom was very comfortable after she took a tour here that I would be safe and that I would enjoy myself and it's so small so I feel like I won't get lost, and I feel like people care about me here and I'm not just a number. They care about my success and I felt the connection.

Jessica and Daniel did not mention a connection from a tour but instead got involved right away and felt like their participation in Student Government gave them an immediate connection to the campus.

Although there were some differences in the initial connection to campus, all participants reported that they felt a much stronger connection after they had joined their chapter. This is not a surprising result, as Greek chapters at Southeastern are designed to help students become part of a group and find their place in the community. However, it was interesting when considering that most of the participants already felt like they were connected. The fact that they were able to connect further and at a deeper level is significant. When reflecting, James was surprised by this deeper connection and how he had become associated with the fraternity as a whole. He said,

I feel even more connected which is actually surprising. I don't know I feel like people know me as kind of like the face of the fraternity like they see me and they

like that's that Beta guy, and then they like meet my brothers and there like hey you're with Beta.

Rebecca had felt little to no connection when she came to school and told me that one of the biggest reason she did not feel connected was a lack of meaningful friendships. When asked to think about her relationship to the campus now that she had joined her chapter, she told me,

So, then, like, joining Greek Life created, like, this separation between, like, 'Southeast is my home' and 'Southeast is, like, really my home' and, like, these are my friends and these are my people. So. That's the biggest difference.

She had finally formed close connections with other students and as a result felt like a part of the campus community.

### **Finding a Place**

A common theme emerged around students looking to find their place on campus. This theme included students who were looking to connect within their chapters through the idea of brotherhood or sisterhood. It also included students who wanted to find a place on the campus where they could be around other students who share common values with them. These ideas varied greatly among the individual students and will be discussed in more detail below.

#### **Brotherhood/ sisterhood.**

While examining the relationship between what causes students to want to affiliate and how they connect to campus another theme emerged. The idea of brotherhood (or sisterhood) was often reported as an important factor in both joining the

chapter and for staying involved. Brotherhood is defined by McCreary and Schutts (2015) as having the following characteristics: solidarity, a shared social experience, belonging, and accountability. This finding fits into the larger idea of Southeast as a family that students described in some of the previous setting. Many students came to Southeast because of the family environment the university has cultivated, so it makes sense that they would be attracted to the brotherhood or sisterhood elements of their chapter as well. In fact, Daniel even described the brotherhood from his chapter as a “family atmosphere.”

Like many students at Southeast, Jessica came from a military family and struggled to find a place that was home. She found this home through the sisterhood in her chapter. She described it like this,

I wanted to join because my mom’s in the military and we’ve moved around my whole life. And so, I never had like a home necessarily. And I have just one brother, and so I really wanted a family that was stable, or something I could always turn back to or come back to, no matter where in life I went. So, my whole family is on the other side of the country, but I will always have my sorority here.

Her chapter provided a sense of stability that had been missing from her life and became her second family when her real family was so far away. James also had an experience that went beyond what he expected to get out of the brothers from his chapter. He valued brotherhood as a connection not only to the campus but to members of his chapter well beyond. He told me,

I like the whole brotherhood aspect it seemed like something I already have kept close to my heart, you know family and everything and helping other folks out.

It's just cool that ever since I have crossed, I have met guys that are Betas from all over the world, people from when I go back home over the summer I met like ten guys like the first week back home, and they was just saying if I ever need anything I could hit them up.

The fact that James had made meaningful connections beyond the campus helps to illustrate the value of brotherhood to the student beyond just Southeast University.

### **Shared values.**

The final theme that was revealed during this study was that students were forming connections based on their shared faith or values with their chapter. This theme was not as prevalent as the other themes, as just over half of the participants formed connections in this manner. However, it is important because it is another avenue of connection that helps to paint a broader picture when considering the research questions. While all chapters hold values that are important to their members, I was surprised with the diversity of chapters to which this theme applied. When I started noticing the theme developing I thought that maybe it was some of the participants from the same chapter lining up. Actually, the chapters involved included an NPHC and two NPC chapters as well as a religiously-oriented chapter not affiliated with a national council. Students from each of these chapters all shared feelings of connection to their chapter based on its values.

For example, Jessica picked her chapter due to its values linking up with her own. When asked why she chose her chapter she responded,

So, I was choosing based on values, more or less, between the organizations I had. The values of my organization fit really well personally with me. Their main like concepts are justice, sisterhood and love. And I'm a criminal justice major, so of



course, that spoke to me a lot. Love has always just been something that like, I took as one of my personal values and then sisterhood was something I was looking for. So, they fit with me.

Emily also connected to her chapter based upon their values aligning with hers. She described her first encounter with her chapter saying,

So, our organization, because it is faith-based, one of the things they do at the beginning of every semester is, they do a prayer walk around campus. I mean, I remember walking back to my dorm, the start of the semester and I saw a group of girls in a circle praying and I just thought that was really sweet anyways, and then I walked up and noticed it was Gamma chapter girls. And so when I saw they finished praying, I simply wanted to just tell them how much I appreciated seeing them, you know, actively live out their faith like that, and rather than just sit there and tell me, “Oh, well, thank you. Have a nice day,” they looked at me and were like, “Well, do you want to come walk with us and pray with us?” And they just welcomed me in right away, and I just very clearly felt that was that nudge that I needed to say, “This is, this is what you need to do.”

These students are ultimately describing their process of finding their place on the campus. The connections of brotherhood or sisterhood as well as joining a community of students who shared their values, was an important factor in their decision to join a Greek chapter.

### **Summary**

Alexander Astin (1984) predicted that the more students become involved on their campus, the more positive developmental outcomes they will realize. Based on the interviews it was not possible to shed light on what the ultimate developmental gains were, but Involvement Theory predicts that these gains would follow increased involvement. The participants in this study all reported that they had become more

involved since joining their chapters. While some of this involvement shifted to other areas, primarily within their chapter, their overall involvement became greater as did the depth of their activity. Participants had become involved in a variety of ways during their first year of college, particularly through academic clubs and residence halls, but once they joined their chapter their involvements shifted toward primarily Greek events. However, this allowed them to connect to the campus in new ways as new opportunities arose from the diverse activities that their brothers and sisters participated in and shared with them. This pattern of new connections was so strong that all participants also reported that their connection to the campus had grown stronger after they had joined their chapter, even with many participants reporting a very strong initial connection to the campus. These results will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

#### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to understand how Greek affiliated students' involvement and connection to campus changes as a result of them joining a fraternity or sorority. To accomplish this, interviews were conducted with eight Greek-affiliated students at a small, private university in the Southeast. This chapter will present a summary of the findings, conclusions, and implications drawn from these interviews. Additionally, this chapter will examine implications for practice in the field of Higher Education as well as future research opportunities.

As Greek Life has been in the news most frequently for negative reasons (Clay, 2018; Reilly, 2018; Spencer, 2018), it is important to know more about potential benefits to students who affiliate in order to know if the risks of negative outcomes are still worth taking. This study aimed to fill a gap in the literature by linking the established knowledge of Astin's (1993) involvement theory to Greek involvement. My study draws upon Astin's (1993) framework to look at involvement and how it changes within fraternities and sororities. Astin's (1993) I-E-O model is well suited to this because it looks at where students come in and how they change. Data were collected on students' initial thoughts on involvement in community when they first started at Southeastern, and then these thoughts were compared to how their perspectives changed after affiliating

into the Greek environment. Based on Astin's (1993) work, we know that students who become involved are more likely to make developmental gains, but it was unknown how students' involvement specifically in Greek chapters would impact their overall involvement and their connection to their campus. This study sought to examine these relationships, specifically how students' involvement changes based in the I-E-O model's predictions of student development, with the input being students' prior experiences, the environment being their experiences in the Greek system, and the output being the changes to their involvement and connection to campus after affiliating. Based on this background, the first research question in this study was:

1. Does becoming affiliated in a Greek Life organization influence involvement patterns of students who choose to join them?
  - a. If there are changes in involvement why do they take place?

The theoretical basis used in this project was Astin's (1993) I-E-O model. This model was meant to describe the overall process of college student development with the input being, "characteristics of the student at the time of initial entry to the institution" and the outcomes being, "the student's characteristics after exposure to the environment" of college (Astin, 1993, p. 7). However, it is possible to narrow the scope of the model and use it as a tool to analyze the changes that result from involvement in the Greek system. In this case, the input (I) would be the characteristics of the students prior to affiliation. The environment (E) would be the time and energy invested in their chapter and related activities. The output (O) would be the characteristics of the students after they had been affiliated with their chapter for at least a year. The findings presented in this chapter are

measured through this lens, looking for changes in student characteristics based on the I-E-O model.

There were three findings that directly related to this research question. One of the most impactful findings was that students who joined a Greek chapter became more focused on the depth of their involvement, often reducing their breadth of involvement by dropping either membership or leadership roles in clubs or activities that they had joined before they had affiliated. Additionally, it was found that after affiliating, involvement often switched from activities related to academic major to the student's Greek chapter. Finally, Greek students' motivation for involvement seemed to be tied to what skills they could gain from their chapter such as connections, job skills, and a place to belong.

The clearest finding related to the first research question was that involvement becomes more focused for students who join a Greek chapter. All but two of the participants described a process where they had been involved in other ways, but when they joined their chapter, they had to make difficult decisions about how to spend their time. After spending time in the Greek environment, the output was that students changed their priorities and reoriented them towards what was most important. Managing their obligations led them to make choices, with some previous involvement being reduced to make way for their expanding chapter responsibilities. However, almost all of the students who participated in the study reported that, overall, they were more deeply involved on campus. The only exception was Daniel, who said that he became so involved right away as a first-year student that it did not really change for him. Emily realized a dramatic shift in the level of her involvement from her input of her first year

saying, “I would say [her involvement] has changed. I felt pretty passionate coming in, that I wanted to experience that, but I would encourage it ten-fold now.” Rebecca described the change in her involvement as, “literally zero to hundred.” Likewise, Matthew said that for him involvement went from it not being a priority to being something that was very important to him.

This outcome of affiliation to Greek chapters seemed to be consistent with much of the research that found that students who joined a Greek chapter reported significant gains in various involvement measures from the NSSE data (Hayek et al., 2002; NSSE, 2011; Patton et al., 2011). In fact, these results build upon the NSSE-based studies and show that a greater level of involvement can be found in deeper, more meaningful experiences. These findings also aligned particularly well with the work of Hayek et al. (2002), who found that Greek-affiliated students scored higher on measures of involvement than non-Greek students. Although the students in the current study shifted their involvement due to their Greek affiliation, their involvement also became more focused. Sarah used words, such as “narrowed down” and “deeper,” to describe how her involvement changed after she became affiliated with her chapter. As a result, they gained a deeper involvement than they had experienced before. In an extreme case, Rebecca, who was not involved before becoming Greek, went from not involved at all to extremely involved because of her desire to participate in Greek Life. Two students in the study did not report losing any involvement; in fact, they retained everything that they were involved in before. Those who reduced involvement simply became more focused in their involvement, and the two who did not lose any involvement were able to take on

more leadership roles. Although three of the participants gained involvement as described above, the other participants did lose some involvement as they became more deeply associated with their chapter. While this loss of involvement could be seen as a negative, the students reported that they were gaining more meaningful involvement. They all took on leadership positions in their chapters and described their experiences in these roles as more meaningful to them. Involvement Theory predicts that students will make more developmental gains the more involved they are. In this case, the students are actually becoming more involved because they are taking on roles that required much more time and energy investment. Where they might drop involvement that does not require much effort like attending a club meeting, they assumed roles that required more time and responsibilities as leaders and leaders and organizers.

Another finding centered around the shifting of involvement from being closely associated with academic major to being associated primarily with the chapter. Five of the participants became involved with a club related to their major during their first year at Southeastern. Two of the participants did not get involved in a major-related club but joined other organizations. One student was not involved in any way during her first year. Therefore, of the students who did join a club their first semester, five of the seven had joined one that was associated with their academic major. This finding deals more with an output of the primary involvement factor shifting from academic related organizations to their chapter as a result of time spent in the Greek environment.

Although there is no literature on this phenomenon, a closely related area of research addresses the impact of Greek affiliation on academic performance, specifically

grade point average (GPA) (Asel et al., 2009; DeBard & Sacks, 2011; Long, 2012; Pike, 2003; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). However, this literature has resulted in mixed findings on the impact of Greek affiliation on GPA, with some studies (Asel et al., 2009; Nelson et al., 2006) finding that Greek involvement had a negative impact on GPA while others (DeBard & Sacks, 2011; Long, 2012; Pike, 2003; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001) showed that Greek students' GPAs were higher than non-Greek. The current study did not look specifically at GPA, but the transition of student involvement away from academic clubs could be indicative of a change of focus on the part of the student. Moving further away from the academic department could have a negative impact on academics. Learning from these studies, student affairs practitioners should work to build campus partnerships that can help to re-establish connections to the academic departments. As students became more deeply involved with their chapters, the importance of academics should be emphasized. On a similar note, responsibility to the chapter might also have a positive impact on GPA, as the members are required to meet an average GPA standard. Several participants stated that the success of the chapter motivated them to be more involved both socially and academically.

The final finding associated with the first research question is that the motivation for Greek involvement was related to gaining either skills, connections that would be valuable after college, or a desire to serve others. In this study, Jessica, Emily, and Daniel were motivated to become involved in Greek Life because they saw it as an opportunity to make a difference or practice servant leadership. This finding makes sense as fraternities and sororities tend to place values on skills and connections, and as students



change from their initial involvement inputs to a Greek environment, their values seem to change to align more with their current environment. Sarah, Stephanie, and Rebecca were primarily motivated to get involved because they wanted to build social, academic, and career skills. Matthew reported that both of these factors motivated him, and James did not describe any particular motivating factors. Although this finding is not as directly related to the first research question in the same way as the other two findings, it is important because the reasons that motivated these students to join Greek chapters reveals information about why students choose to get involved on campus in the first place and what they hope to gain from this involvement. A few studies in the literature looked at what Greek students who became involved gained rather than simply if they were more involved or not. For example, the findings that students gained useful life skills was supported in the literature. Bureau et al. (2011) and Carini et al. (2006) found that students in a Greek chapter made gains in areas such as faculty interaction, collaborative learning, overcoming academic challenge, and others. These gains align with the desire of the students in this study to gain more real-world skills as a result of their participation in Greek Life. Astin's (1984) I-E-O model predicts that the output from the students' involvement in their environment (Greek chapters) would result in an output of skills and competencies that would be useful in life after college. These students are demonstrating that they are both interested in gaining these skills and showing that they had acquired them. In addition to gaining these skills, students were also finding a place to belong with shared values under the ideas of brotherhood and sisterhood.

These findings also show a pattern of student involvement that, over time, becomes more focused on the chapter. While some students were able to stay involved in the activities they participated in prior to affiliation, others did not. However, the overall trend is away from their first involvement contacts. This shift may have included academic clubs, residence halls, or other general involvement activities. As students became more involved in their chapter, the chapter becomes their priority. Several of the participants also saw their chapters as the best place to gain the skills and connections they are seeking. The focus on the chapter could be seen as a negative, as one would think shifting involvement primarily to the chapter would isolate these students. However, in the next section we will see that the chapters provide a variety of new connections to the campus as a whole that these students are taking advantage of.

The second research question in this study was:

How does becoming affiliated in a Greek Life organization influence a student's perceived connection to campus?

There were three findings related to this theme as well. The first was that students who participated in Greek Life created new connections to the campus that they would not have made otherwise. Additionally, most participants reported a strong initial connection to the campus that grew even stronger after they affiliated. The final finding revealed that Greek students were able to better connect to the chapter through the ideas of brotherhood and sisterhood by the choices they made related to the chapter's goals.

One of the most consistent findings was that students who participated in Greek Life reported that their experiences with their chapters led them to make new connections to the campus community that they would not have made otherwise. Based on the interviews, it seemed as though many of the students connected to only a small part of the campus prior to their affiliation. As discussed in the previous section, these connections often took the form of connecting through their academic department. In addition to connecting through academic clubs, students also frequently reported that their classes, particularly their major classes, were one of the primary ways they interacted with other students. Developing relationships with other students in the residence halls was a third way that students were able to build connections to the campus before Greek involvement. However, each these avenues of connection provided only some opportunities for connection and did not always encourage extra involvement, which may have limited the scope of the connections that these students could make. Once students joined the Greek community, new pathways for them to connect to new people and organizations became open to them that did not exist before that environment became part of their lives.

Students connected in two different ways after joining their chapter: making connections to students within their chapter and networking and forming connections to other non-Greek parts of the campus. Of the participants in this study, everyone except Matthew told me that their participation in Greek Life allowed them to make external connections to other areas of the campus that they would not have made otherwise. They found this new involvement through connections that they made with people from their

chapter and by going to new events to support their brothers and sisters. Some students found jobs, leadership positions, or other opportunities from brothers or sisters who were connected in different ways. Others went to events that might have been outside their comfort zone because one of their friends might have been involved in, participating, or coordinating the event. These connections multiplied across all the different students in the chapter and led to significantly more involvement opportunities.

These connections also occurred in the chapter. Five of the eight participants described that their connections to their brothers and sisters in their chapter or other Greeks became the most meaningful relationships they had formed. In some of these cases, the students talked about how they had replaced their prior connections or social groups. Sarah went as far as to say that instead of her suitemate or her roommate, she now best connected with her sisters. Rebecca summed up her connections by discussing how she had met so many people through Greek Life, and she told me, “There’s so many people that I’m like, wow, we really never would have been friends but, like, I love you.” She had not connected to anyone on campus before but now had found a core group of friends who she was extremely close to. The new Greek environment opened up a world of new connections to these students and created a major shift in how they connect to the campus compared to pre-affiliation, a clear indication that these students’ increased involvement was an outcome of their participation in a fraternity or sorority.

The literature is again somewhat mixed in relation to the impact of Greek involvement on the campus community. Some studies (Pike, 2003; Jacobs & Archie, 2008) found that Greek participation led to a decrease in sense of community, while

Cheng (2004) and Spitzberg and Thorndike (1992) found the opposite to be true. This study tended to align with the findings of Pike (2003) and Jacobs and Archie (2008), which concluded that participation in Greek chapters led to beneficial factors when measuring students' perception of community. It is difficult to explain these discrepancies in the literature. One possible explanation that applies to this research project is that all the students who participated held some sort of leadership position in their chapter. As leaders, the participants in this study may have had a different experience than the standard members. Leaders are more involved across the organization and are also responsible for planning events with other chapters. They have had a more robust Greek experience, which might help to explain why they experienced a greater sense of community. For example, the students in this study reported stronger connections within their chapters, a greater feeling of connectedness to new areas of campus, and new experiences and opportunities with new people. The studies cited were looking at similar questions but were all large quantitative studies focused on all Greek students, not just leaders. It is possible that the fact that all the participants in this study were leaders may have led to different outcomes because of the extent of their involvement (Astin, 1993). Also, many of the quantitative studies did not have a very strong significance, so it is possible that small differences in each individual study could have led to different results. For example, Pike (2003) only looked at data from Association of American Universities (AAU) schools. These differences in population may explain why there is disagreement in the literature.

Another finding was the fact that most participants reported a strong initial connection to the campus that grew even stronger after they affiliated. One of the most surprising aspects of this was that nearly all the participants reported a very strong connection to the campus right from the beginning. I did not expect that such extensive involvement would occur, as typically there is a wide range of students' perceptions about the university climate when they get to campus. It is possible that students who self-selected to participate in this research were more likely to feel a connection, and students who were less connected at first would be less likely to participate. Not only was I surprised by how many of the students became involved right away, but it was also unexpected how strong a connection they felt about their choices. With Rebecca as the outlier in this study, participants used words such as "special," "family," and "fell in love" to describe how they felt when they arrived. Again, I did not expect such a high degree of initial connection. This finding may be a unique phenomenon to Southeastern, or other small private schools, as students often say they come to the university seeking this kind of connection.

This study was an interesting case where the input and output were similar, with the exception that the environment had made the degree of connection even stronger. The participants' initial involvement was stronger than expected, so I thought this connection might impact their ability to evaluate their involvement after affiliation. I also thought this high level of involvement might skew the results because it would be more difficult to see any further gains in involvement. However, these assumptions clearly did not impact the data. Every participant reported a stronger connection to the campus than

before they joined Greek Life. This finding was the only area of the study that showed a one hundred percent agreement among all the participants. When taken with the rest of the findings, it makes sense that students would see an increase in their involvement. As previously discussed, they were finding new ways to connect to new parts of the campus, getting involved with new organizations, and meeting new people. Logically, it follows that due to these factors, they would naturally feel a stronger connection to the university as a result of their expanded connections. It is important to remember that this particular set of students might be a unique set, as they all volunteered to participate in the survey and were all leaders in their chapters, so they all had a positive experience.

The final theme that emerged during this project was the idea that brotherhood or sisterhood was an important connection point for these students. This connection was the least prevalent among the themes and represented five of the eight participants. However, I do believe it is significant because it helps to explain why students made some of the choices that they reported. Students told me they were looking for a family away from their home and finding this type of connection was one of their primary motivations for joining their chapter. Finding this second family opened up new ways for a student to get involved. This theme is also one of the hardest ones to put into definitive terms. It is very difficult to measure what impact students' finding a family within their chapter has on their involvement patterns at school. Finding their place in a chapter certainly helps students meet Maslow's (1943) psychological needs of belonging, and to a certain degree, esteem. From here students are free to explore the highest tier of needs, self-actualization. Although this study did not look at any Latinx chapters, the idea of the

importance of sense of family and accountability was discussed by Arellano (2018) in her work with Latinx chapters. It was interesting to see sense of family come up with NIC, NPC, and NPHC chapters in my study as well. Beyond this, it is difficult to measure what impact this sense of family had on students beyond serving as a starting point for some of the other benefits that were discussed previously.

### **Limitations**

Participation in this study was voluntary and self-selected. Invitations to participate were sent out to Greek chapters through each organization's president. Due to the nature of the recruitment process, students who responded to the invitation tended to be those who were highly involved in the organization, as every participant held either a role of president, vice-president, or a chair position. It was not intentional to recruit only students who held senior leadership positions, but this factor surely impacted the study. The students who participated tended to have had very positive experiences with Greek Life, which have likely influenced their responses. It is not known if the same results would have occurred if students who were simply members and not leaders of their chapters had participated. However, this group of participants did allow a more focused look at how students who hold these high leadership positions feel.

This study was also limited in time and scope. As a single institution study, the resources and time available for this project were limited to a finite amount of time and finite number of students. This limitation may have impacted the results, as one of the missions of Southeastern is to develop a family-like atmosphere on campus. The



connection to this goal can be seen in the fact that all the participants but one described a very strong initial connection to the campus. All the participants described an increase in their connection to campus, but this increase might not be the case at a larger college where the kind of campus environment possible at Southeastern University might not be as feasible to establish. Ideally, this study should be repeated across several different campuses to see if similar results occur in the future.

While the participants represented a fairly accurate sample of Southeastern's overall student population and chapters, two of the eight total chapters at the institution did not have a participant in the study: an NIC fraternity and an NPHC sorority. The study was also limited by not having a representative from the NPHC sorority participate because, as a result, no Black or Latinx women participated in the study. Participants included five White females, two White males, and one Black male. In the case of the NPHC organizations at Southeastern, each chapter has a very small number of members, which made finding volunteers to participate more difficult. After the data were collected, a new Latina sorority chartered at Southeastern, but it has not been a campus organization for a long enough time to provide useful data for this project. If this study is repeated, however, it would be critical to focus on underrepresented women from whom this study, for the reasons outlined above, was not able to collect data.

Along the same lines, while Southeastern has a diverse variety of organizations, it is a smaller school and does not have as much depth in each council representation as larger universities might have. Southeastern has three NIC chapters, two NPC chapters, one non-NPC sorority, two NPHC chapters, and just recently added one multicultural

chapter. Although there is a good variety represented, there are many differences between various chapters, and with two or less chapters in each governing council, the traits of the individual chapters may skew the results. It would be helpful in the future to conduct this study at a larger school with greater chapter depth.

Southeastern also has strong cultural connection to the community, and the results of this study might not be the same at a larger institution. While the students in this study found stronger connections to the community after affiliation, they also came in with a strong predisposition towards being part of a community. In fact, the close-knit community may have been what attracted them to Southeastern in the first place. It is important to note this, as it would impact the results when conducted at less community driven institutions.

Finally, there are potential limitations with regard to the researcher that should be addressed as well. There is potential for researcher bias to occur, as the researched had a strong influence on all aspects of the study. This included roles as interviewer, coder, and design architect of the study. While steps were taken to reduce researcher bias, it is possible that significant bias is still present in the study and could be a limitation.

### **Implications for Practice**

While the results of this study are not necessarily generalizable to all higher education institutions, there are some practical applications that can be realized from the results, especially at small, private universities that may be similar in structure to Southeastern. For example, the analyses offers insights into potential student affairs

practices for working with Greek students and offering practical applications. One of the main ways in which this research can be applied to practice is helping student affairs professionals demonstrate the value of a Greek Life program. With a rising number of Greek chapters making headlines for negative outcomes each year, administrators are asked more and more to justify the value of keeping Greek organizations on campus. Even though much of the current research (Asel et al., 2009; DeBard & Sacks, 2011; Long, 2012; Pike, 2003; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001) focuses on academics and retention, building connections to campus and offering new opportunities offer student affairs professionals another way to highlight the benefits for students who affiliate with a Greek chapter. Students in this study who participated in Greek Life not only became more involved, but they also became involved in different ways. By supporting their brothers and sisters at events outside of their chapters, they helped to create a more vibrant campus community not just in the Greek world but also in the larger campus as a whole. This kind of involvement goes beyond the Greek students and benefits the entire student body. Administrators should work to further encourage this phenomenon by promoting values within chapters that help students support each other's outside efforts. Students who are more involved overall tend to realize more gains from college than their peers who are not (Astin, 1984). If Greek Life gives students more opportunities for involvement, and therefore potential developmental gains; these potential outcomes can be used to make a strong case for its value. However, it should be stated that while it was found that students did gain new skills from Greek involvement, it cannot be documented

that these skills can for certain lead to general development. To explore this aspect of Astin's (1993) model would be something for a future study to further investigate.

Additionally, these findings can show the value of a Greek program by highlighting the close connection to campus that Greek students build over time. At Southeastern, each student in this study built a stronger connection to the campus than they had before they affiliated. This close connection is valuable in several ways. It may support retention and persistence in college. As prior research has shown (Nelson et. al, 2006; Debard & Sacks, 2011), fraternity and sorority membership has a beneficial impact on retention rates. The current research may help shed some light as well on why this may be the case by tying this prior research together with Astin (1984). Logically, as students make these stronger connections, they are more likely to persist in college. Current practitioners can use this information to help make the case for the value of Greek Life.

Another application for current practice from this study is a better understanding of student involvement patterns. The data revealed that Greek-affiliated students forge many of their first involvement opportunities through clubs, particularly those related to their academic major. It is important to help students connect to these early opportunities. Student affairs professionals should help students to get involved early on and in many different ways. With these data, efforts can be targeted towards how students naturally choose to find involvement opportunities. More resources can be given to academic clubs, and more opportunities can be created to get students connected with these clubs. While the students who participated in this study were all Greek-affiliated, they joined

campus-based clubs before they joined their chapter, so it might be possible that these results could apply to non-Greek students as well.

Finally, participants reported that they were first interested in joining their chapter because of the ideas of service and brotherhood or sisterhood. Data on how and why these students chose to become part of the Greek community may also support Greek recruitment efforts and increase participation in their Greek programs. Additionally, this information can be used to target programming and events within the Greek community. Knowing more about why students choose to affiliate and what values are important to them is key for staying on top of current trends in the Greek community.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There is ample opportunity for further research about Greek Life in relation to involvement and campus connection. One of the challenges of this study was finding existing literature that fit within this particular topic. Greek Life and student involvement each have an abundance of existing literature but there has been very little work done at the intersection of these two areas. Much of the research has been of a quantitative nature focusing on areas such as impact on GPA (DeBard & Sacks, 2011; Long, 2012; Nelson et al, 2006; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001); therefore, there is room for more qualitative work to be done in order to get a full picture of the impact of the Greek experience.

Additionally, this study has shown that officers in their chapters seem to demonstrate gains in involvement and connections from their participation. It would be helpful to know how this finding translates to the academic side as well. There have been many

studies that examine GPA, (DeBard & Sacks, 2011; Long, 2012; Nelson et al, 2006; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001), and they have generally pulled from a large generic sample. Future research could be conducted to explore any differences in academic gains between students who hold leadership roles and those who are general members. Studies related to academic benefits from Greek affiliation have been mixed, exploring further subgroups might help to explain the discrepancies.

One of the limitations of this project is the small scope and sample of students. However, it resulted in findings that help researchers understand why students affiliate with sororities or fraternities. Additional research should expand to include multiple colleges of different types. Southeastern is a small, liberal arts college that focuses on providing close contact with all of its students. Would students feel the same sense of connection at a large, public university? It would be useful to see if the same trends were seen at different types of institutions beyond a small private school in the Southeast. Eighty-eight percent of the participants reported a strong initial connection to the campus, so it would also be useful to sample students purposefully who did not connect right away to see if similar outcomes would occur. Rebecca ultimately did make a strong connection to the campus, but with only one participant who met the criteria of not having a strong first connection, it is hard to say if this is a unique result or not. Rebecca tended to have a different experience related to many factors measured in this study.

Finally, future research in this area could be conducted on a larger quantitative scale. The purpose of this study was to understand how students change after affiliation, with a qualitative methodology being used to answer research questions focused on the

“why” of their involvement. However, a large-scale quantitative project could be useful as well. Data could be drawn from NSSE survey responses and compared to demographic information about participants. It may not be able to focus on students who are leaders in their chapters, but having data from an overall perspective of how students responded to questions about involvement and campus connection before and after they affiliated would be useful to compare to the results of this project.

### **Summary**

Greek Life on college campuses has been and remains a controversial topic in higher education. Even though the negative aspects of Greek Life continue to make headlines, there are many redeeming qualities of Greek programs that make them a worthwhile investment for colleges. Because of the potential negative outcomes of Greek life, it has become increasingly important to understand the value of Greek programs and understand exactly how students and the university benefit from their existence. Even though other researchers have investigated some of the more traditional measures of value for Greek programs, such as the academic performance of Greek students or their retention rates, this study aimed to understand how Greek students connect to and get involved on their campus. The benefits of student involvement are well understood, and most schools spend a significant amount of resources creating these involvement opportunities. While much is known about the benefits of involvement, there is much more work to be done in understanding how students form these connections and why they do so.

This study has shown that Greek affiliated student leaders do, in fact, increase their involvement within the university. Findings show that these students, while having initially strong connections to the campus, felt that connection grew even stronger after affiliating. These are very positive involvement outcomes. Even though these outcomes do not mitigate the difficult issues that Greek Life presents to colleges and universities, this study does show that there are many benefits to the Greek system if these challenges can be overcome. Understanding more about how Greek affiliated students get involved and how these patterns change as they become more entrenched in their chapter will help student affairs practitioners be better informed in their work with college students. Knowing that Greek students may become more involved and feel more connected to their campus helps focus Greek programs as well as helps justify continued investment in Greek Life. These students are finding their place at the institution, and by doing so, are contributing to creating a more vibrant and interconnected campus environment. The benefits of this involvement then may extend beyond Greek students to the campus as a whole.



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APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction- Welcome, I'm happy you are able to participate in this interview today

**A) Interviewee Background**

- 1: What is your class standing, and how long have you been a member of your chapter?
- 2: What made you want to be a part of Greek Life and specifically your chapter?
- 3: Do you hold any leadership (offices or chair) positions in your chapter?
- 4: What does campus involvement mean to you?

**B) Pre-affiliation**

*For the next set of questions, please think back to before you joined your chapter:*

- 1: Tell me about what kind of activities you were involved in on campus and why you chose to participate in them.
- 2: How did you spend your free time?
- 3: Did you feel connected to the campus?  
-Follow up: If yes, in what ways, if no, why not?
- 4: How much of a priority would you say participating in organized activities outside of the classroom was to you?

**C) Post-affiliation**

*Thinking about your life at college now that you are part of a chapter:*

- 1: What kind of activities are you involved in now, and how do they differ from before you were affiliated?
- 2: How do you spend your free time now?

3: Do you associate with students outside of your chapter or primarily with students from your chapter?

-Follow up: If yes, how did you meet these students?

4: Tell me about any clubs, activities, or student groups you participate in that do not involve your chapter and how you became interested in them.

5: Tell me about your connection to the campus now. Do you feel more or less connected than before? Why do you feel this way?

6: How much of a priority would you say participating in organized activities outside of the classroom is to you now, and has that changed from before?

**D) Wrap Up**

1: Overall, how would you say joining your chapter has influenced your involvement on campus?

2: Do you have any other thoughts on this topic that you would like to share?

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTION CROSSWALK

Question 1	Question 2
1. How does becoming affiliated in a Greek Life organization influence involvement patterns of students who choose to join them? a. If there are differences, why do these changes in involvement take place?	2. How does becoming affiliated in a Greek Life organization influence a student's perceived connection to campus?
<b>A) Interviewee Background</b>	
1: What is your class standing, and how long have you been a member of your chapter?	
2: What made you want to be a part of Greek Life and specifically your chapter?	2: What made you want to be a part of Greek Life and specifically your chapter?
3: Do you hold any leadership (offices or chair) positions in your chapter?	
4: What does campus involvement mean to you?	4: What does campus involvement mean to you?
<b>B) Pre-Affiliation</b>	
1: Tell me about what kind of activities you were involved in on campus and why you chose to participate in them.	
2: How did you spend your free time?	2: How did you spend your free time?
	3: Did you feel connected to the campus? -Follow up: If yes, in what ways, if no, why not?
4: How much of a priority would you say participating in organized activities outside of the classroom was to you?	
<b>C) Post-Affiliation</b>	
1: What kind of activities are you involved in now, and how do they differ from before you were affiliated?	
2: How do you spend your free time now?	2: How do you spend your free time now?
	3: Do you associate with students outside of your chapter or primarily with students from your chapter? - Follow up: If yes, how did you meet these students?
4: Tell me about any clubs, activities, or student groups you participate in that do not involve your chapter and how you became interested in them.	
	5: Tell me about your connection to the campus now. Do you feel more or less connected than before? Why do you feel this way?
6: How much of a priority would you say participating in organized activities outside of the classroom is to you now, and has that changed from before?	
<b>D) Wrap Up</b>	
1: Overall, how would you say joining your chapter has influenced your involvement on campus?	
2: Do you have any other thoughts on this topic that you would like to share?	2: Do you have any other thoughts on this topic that you would like to share?

## APPENDIX C

### IRB APPROVAL



#### OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY

2718 Beverly Cooper Moore  
and Irene Mitchell Moore  
Humanities and  
Research  
Administration Bldg.  
PO Box 26170  
Greensboro, NC 27402-6170  
336.256.0253  
Web site: [www.uncg.edu/orc](http://www.uncg.edu/orc)  
Federalwide Assurance (FWA)  
#216

**To:** Christopher O'Connor  
Teacher Ed/Higher Ed  
2345 Dreyfus Ct Garner, NC 27529

**From:** UNCG IRB

**Date:** 2/07/2018

**RE:** Notice of IRB Exemption

**Exemption Category:** 2.Survey, interview, public observation

**Study #:** 18-0060

**Study Title:** The Impact of Greek Affiliation on Student Involvement Patterns

This submission has been reviewed by the IRB and was determined to be exempt from further review according to the regulatory category cited above under 45 CFR 46.101(b).

#### **Study Description:**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of Greek affiliated college students in relation to the ways their campus involvement changes as a result of joining a greek letter organization. Additionally, this project seeks to understand how greek affiliated students connection to campus may change after they join. This study will help fill a gap in the literature connecting Greek affiliation and student involvement that has yet to be investigated.

## Investigator's Responsibilities

Please be aware that any changes to your protocol must be reviewed by the IRB prior to being implemented. Please utilize the most recent and approved version of your consent form/information sheet when enrolling participants. The IRB will maintain records for this study for three years from the date of the original determination of exempt status.

Signed letters, along with stamped copies of consent forms and other recruitment materials will be scanned to you in a separate email. **Stamped consent forms must be used unless the IRB has given you approval to waive this requirement.** Please notify the ORI office immediately if you have an issue with the stamped consents forms.

Please be aware that valid human subjects training and signed statements of confidentiality for all members of research team need to be kept on file with the lead investigator. Please note that you will also need to remain in compliance with the university "Access To and Retention of Research Data" Policy which can be found at [http://policy.uncg.edu/university-policies/research\\_data/](http://policy.uncg.edu/university-policies/research_data/).

CC:

Colleen Fairbanks, Teacher Ed/Higher Ed

## APPENDIX D

### IRB INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: **The Impact of Greek Affiliation on Student Involvement Patterns**

Principal Investigator: Christopher O'Connor

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Colleen Fairbanks

**What is this all about?**

I am asking you to participate in this research study because I hope to learn more about how joining your chapter has influenced your college experience, particularly in the ways you are involved on campus. This research project will take around an hour and will involve an interview. These interviews will be audio recorded. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording. Your participation in this research project is voluntary.

**How will this negatively affect me?**

No, other than the time you spend on this project there are no known or foreseeable risks involved with this study.

**What do I get out of this research project?**

You will help to determine if Greek affiliated students such as yourself make beneficial gains in involvement, leadership, and community connections. This information could be beneficial to the Greek community as a whole.

**Will I get paid for participating?**

Participation is voluntary, and no financial compensation is offered.

**What about my confidentiality?**

We will do everything possible to make sure that your information is kept confidential. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. All participants will be given pseudonyms when data is disseminated. The interviews will be digitally recorded and stored on a password protected account on UNC-Greensboro's Box data storage system.

**What if I do not want to be in this research study?**

You do not have to be part of this project. This project is voluntary and it is up to you to decide to participate in this research project. If you agree to participate at any time in this project you may stop participating without penalty.

**What if I have questions?**

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Chris O'Connor at 910-893-1554 or [cdoconno@uncg.edu](mailto:cdoconno@uncg.edu). The faculty advisor is Dr. Colleen Fairbanks who can be reached at [336 334-3746](tel:336-334-3746) or [cmfairba@uncg.edu](mailto:cmfairba@uncg.edu). If you have concerns about how you have been treated in this study call the Office of Research Integrity Director at 1-855-251-2351.



## APPENDIX E

### EMAIL ANNOUNCEMENT

Email Announcement:

Dear Chapter President,

Chris O'Connor is conducting the following dissertation study:

*The Impact of Greek Affiliation on Student Involvement Patterns*

The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of Greek affiliated college students in relation to the ways their campus involvement changes as a result of joining a Greek letter organization. Additionally, this project seeks to understand how Greek affiliated students' connection to campus may change after they join.

Participation is voluntary with no cost or monetary compensation. This non-experimental research study involves a (1) one hour individual interview. Confidentiality will be maintained during data collection and analysis. Students must be at least 18 years of age and members of a Greek letter organization. The study is seeking upperclassmen from a diverse range of greek organizations and demographic backgrounds.

If you have members who might be interested in participating, please have them contact Chris O'Connor at 910-893-1554 or via email at [cdoconno@uncg.edu](mailto:cdoconno@uncg.edu)

Approved IRB  
2/7/18